The work of our hands

H A Mitchell Keays

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BY

H. A. MITCHELL KEAYS

AUTHOR OF

HE THAT EATETH BREAD WITH ME

THE WORK OF OUR HANDS ESTABLISH THOU IT.
Psalm xc-17.

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TO

MY FATHER

THE WORK OF OUR HANDS

CHAPTER ONE

"HEARD the news, Hanscombe?"

"What news?"

"Ah, then you haven't."

The two men walked in silence to the corner.

"After all, you might as well tell me," remarked Hanscombe genially. "I'd hate to hear it from any one else."

Inderrieden laughed. "I just met Bronsart. He asked me to congratulate him. His son is engaged to Forsythe's daughter. What do you think of that for the turn of the wheel?"

The busy commercial day hurried to its close; in the offices of Christian Bronsart & Co. the click of the type-writers lagged; here and there a clerk glanced furtively at the hour.

But in his private room Christie Bronsart still sat at his desk, his eye as bright, his energy as keen of edge as when he first set step across the threshold that morning.

An immense pile of logs smouldered frostily red upon a massive hearth; around it, half-a-dozen chairs remained in the confused grouping in which their late

occupants had left them. Bronsart glanced at the empty seats and smiled. He saw still in each the man who had just quitted it.

He looked down at his hands — delicate, feminine hands with slender fingers, but powerful thumbs. They trembled slightly. He smiled again. This unwonted evidence of weakness amused him — in a way, touched him.

"Ah, but that was a trick worth taking, my boy! You've got those cock-sure fellows by the throat, and they don't even suspect it yet."

On the desk stood a Canton bowl of red-blooded roses. They were always there — fresh every morning from his conservatory. Nature by the river's brim had no charm for Bronsart — he liked it glass-housed, exotic, moist with cultivated dew.

He drew the bowl towards him, and rearranged the brilliant mass of bloom with those deft, artistic, woman's fingers. Every perception was awake, every faculty strained to supremest tension; the moment's caressing of his long-stemmed favourites soothed him.

He looked critically about the room — at the heavy Oriental rug as baffling and elusive in pattern and colouring as the philosophy of the race to which its weavers belonged — at the long row of windows which gave such broad expansive effect of light — and last, at the fire, around which those human pieces on his individual chess-board had lounged at ease, and smoked his choice cigars.

It was all such a scientifically wrought-out setting — so subtly calculated as to psychologic effect — for

those plays in which he acted so dramatic and strategic a part.

"A blazing fire and a good cigar," he murmured. "The directors of the Clifton Cement Company will always remember this interview as a pleasant one."

The great affair with John Forsythe had taught him much — it had taught him to move heaven and earth when possible, to avoid making a personal enemy.

"Ah, if I had that to do now, how differently I'd handle it," he mused. "But I was new to it then, and I had to make my footing on this earth sure somehow."

He looked back at his roses — they rested him. But presently, his thin, sensitive lip quivered curiously; through a narrow plate-glass square he had caught a passing glimpse of his son. "Ah, the boy! Freeze my soul! I haven't forgotten what it feels like. It's a disease that marks a man worse than smallpox, but if you only get it bad enough, I guess it's worth the catching."

He pulled a rose from the bowl, and plucked it, unthinking, apart — petal by petal. "Lord! That Sunday night — why, it's getting on for thirty years ago. That little pink gown — it had a kind of a sprig on it — I don't suppose — "

He got up suddenly, and moved restlessly about the room, drawing the chairs back into their appointed places. Another interview was before him; he must have an altered atmosphere. His thin line of jaw hardened.

"By the Great Molly!" he muttered, "but it's up to me now. This comes of the folly of being a parent."

Fifteen minutes later he met John Forsythe at the door.

"Ah, Forsythe, how are you — how are you? Come in."

"I was just coming, Mr. Bronsart," said Forsythe slowly. He accepted the hand it was impossible to ignore.

"Sit down — sit down," said Bronsart genially.

"Thank you, Mr. Bronsart — no." And for a swift moment Forsythe looked straight at the flexible, debonair little man beside him — and what pride and passion of unconscious hatred there was in the glance! He seemed, in the instant, the figure of a Titan cast in bronze, towering down contemptuous, upon brief, human dust. His clothes hung carelessly upon his fine, bent figure, aged years beyond that of the other, who was yet his senior — his magnificent, leonine head, with its whitened hair, and the rugged face so deeply furrowed, betrayed the tragic temperament fated to lift life's happenings to a lofty plane of joy and sorrow.

The man beside him, master of the little world in which he felt himself well placed, was however, at this moment, conscious of some discomfort — of a desire, indeed, to resort to expletive forbidden in this presence. Yet he would have liked to tell Forsythe how much he sympathized with him — he had always wanted to do that, and he had hoped that this might prove the effective moment for graceful confession. As

that seemed doubtful, however, he merely remarked somewhat abruptly, but with admirable earnestness of demeanour: "Forsythe, your daughter is a pearl of great price. I appreciate that fact to the full, and greatly regret that my wife and daughter are abroad as usual and unable to extend the courtesies to her that the situation certainly demands. I'm sure I hope she is going to be able to make something out of the boy — he's a pretty big untilled field, you know. But then, most men are until some woman takes them in hand. And Aylmer — "

Within him the soul of John Forsythe flinched. "Aylmer!" The familiarity of it upon those lips! Yet henceforth, she, his child, was to belong to this people — she was to become bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh. She was to bear their name — that hated name! — to learn their ways, to live their life.

But he caught back the groan on his lips — straightened his bent figure — not before this man would he reveal himself broken.

Bronsart sank into his chair with a sigh of relief. "But he's a fine old fellow," he reflected. "If he only had a sense of humour! 'Brought up in the fear of the Lord' — you bet that poor girl has been! Bless my soul! Forsythe doesn't belong in this age. He's got his Presbyterian Deity in every nook and corner of his life. Still, I don't know but it's been a good thing for him — and for me!" The sharp grey eyes twinkled. "For it was a pretty staggering trick I played on him, yet what did he do about it? Just interpreted it as the

highest expression of the Divine Will for him." Bronsart whistled softly. "Great idea that! But he got his Presbyterian God and me awfully mixed all the same. Poor Forsythe! Fellows like that have got reserved seats in Heaven sure, but there's no show for them to do up-to-date business down here."

The Forsythe house stood deep among trees, closed to the street by a high brick wall which was a source of irritation to the neighbourhood. Through the iron gate the passers-by in summer-time caught glimpses of a charming old-fashioned garden, and in the winter the house itself was disclosed — a solid stone structure, of simple unencumbered line — a powerful protest against the hysterical erections huddled together as upon a public exhibition ground, outside the offending wall. It had been built by an Englishman, the superfluous son of a great family, who, thirty odd years before, had emigrated, and acquired a large tract of land, merely owing to the desire inborn in his race, of property ownership. But in time he discovered that his holding was heavily timbered, and as by magic a village sprang to birth in his forest upon the edge of the little lake. The boom of commerce displaced the song of the birds; the maddening monody of mighty saws smothered the song of Nature alone with her secrets in the solemn beauty of the great woods. Further and further back from the sound of the lapping waves the dark line retreated, and that heaven which the slender tree-tops brought so near, went with it. Human greed entered paradise,

and made merchandise of its beauty; with it came crime, the brutality of man to man, the anguished sobs of women in the darkness.

When summer came the sun beat pitiless upon stark hills of sawdust, glaring, yellow as brass in the hot light — over their hideousness no tender green wove shroud. Men sweat, and cursed the sun which burnt their burdened backs; they had no time or wish to seek the dewy depths of shade they had been born but to destroy.

When winter came in all its majesty of northern storm, the icy blast wreaked its utmost fury against the hovels pitched like tents upon the unsheltered shore. The wind sought wailing the trees in whose tops it had once made moan — it throttled instead the black breath struggling skyward from the hideous throats of iron chimneys.

Snow fell, and the far away forests were clothed with a mystery of beauty, austere, entrancing in its delicacy — veiled in a silence vast, primeval, unstirred by human sigh.

Snow fell, too, on the sawdust hills, on the hovels, on the dirty decks of the lumber boats. But here, its beauty vanished as it fell — it but added to the misery, the squalor of the human herd.

"Forty-eight cents!" exclaimed a trembling, cold-benumbed man to the young clerk at the Company's Store. "Damn you! You dare to tell me that's all that's coming to me for a whole month's work? You devil! Do you know what you're doing? You're drinking my blood. You devil! Come out here and I'll shoot

you like a dog. I'll shoot you till you're dead — dead — dead. By God, I will."

The clerk was a beardless boy, clean-eyed, his conscience new to business like this. He burnt with shame.

The man staggered out. His soul was a hell. "The boss is worth a million," he muttered. "And me! — Well, ain't I worth forty-eight cents?" He laughed fearfully.

By and by he passed the saloon, belching its light, warmth, welcome, to the wayfaring man, if a fool. He passed, hesitated, turned back, and went in. And there drank deep of the devil's brew — sold, too, by the Company.

The next morning he lay at rest — a sodden carcass on the snow. But he had been a man, made in the image of God — had loved, aspired, and laboured. Then died — worth? — not even forty-eight cents.

The boy behind the counter gave up his job. He was young, obstinate, extreme. He confused death with murder.

For three years the sawmill ran its swift course. Then one day stopped. "No more work — boss's land cleaned out," the men said. Each day the boat bore some of them away, to seek the bread of life elsewhere. They had hardly a backward glance for the deserted shore. They but wanted to forget it — they had lived there the sodden life of serfs. They had had food and shelter, but so in the north woods had the wild things, and freedom and beauty besides.

By and by the last load of lumber left the little dock

— the machinery from the dismantled mill followed it — the big store closed — the overseer's house was empty — his bed left just as he had turned out of it for the last time — the unlocked door swung sullen upon grating hinge.

Warmth, light, the human cheer of even the meanest hovel was gone. The appalling stillness of desertion settled like a pall upon the grim collection of blackened huts — the dock slipped rotting into the silent lake.

The Englishman pocketed his easy million and went "home." He had paid his manager generously, and knew little of the precise methods by which his fortune had been acquired. The store ? — By George! that was a shady institution, but as long as the hoary-handed sons of toil stood it, what business was it of his ?

The house he had built and occupied while his fortune was in the making away to the north, stood tenantless for a dozen years. Then John Forsythe, well known as a rapidly rising young business man, bought it for a song.

And there seemed poetic justice in the fact that the boy who had thrown up his chance with the Eagle Lumber Company because of a question of conscience, should enter thus easily into the home of his former employer.

Later, as the disasters of his life thickened upon him, he held doggedly to this possession. Property had gone up — Christie Bronsart himself had cast envious glances towards that house. Ah! but it was

the frame which enshrined for John Forsythe his most precious memories of the little wife no longer by his side.

It remained his home.

The high iron gate clanged heavily behind Forsythe, as he turned in upon the gravelled walk. Some one must have been awaiting the sound, for before he reached the door, it was thrown open, and a broad beam of light flashed down the path as in welcome. His step quickened. It was late November — the lingering leaves hung listless upon drear branches — even the ivy, splendid splash of scarlet against the cold grey stone, witnessed but of decay, death.

But in the glow of the open doorway a girl stood — a girl radiant in the innocence, the joy, the inalienable anticipation of youth.

CHAPTER TWO

AREN'T they lovely, dad?" said Aylmer. "They come every day," she added shyly.

"Ah!" remarked Forsythe absently. He was not thinking of the flowers in the epergne. He was thinking of his child — of the mystery which had invaded her being. Every allurement of youth — colour, curve, gesture even, had acquired accent, meaning. A half-score of yesterdays ago he had said good-bye to his little daughter with her naïve obedience, her touching dependence upon him, little dreaming that it was for the last time.

And now, across the dinner-table, he watched her furtively, his heart tense with pain. A woman! — Yes, his little girl had become that, and how pitifully eager she was to dig the grave of her childhood! Love? — The boy and girl called it that.

Ah! how he longed to take her in his strong arms, and carry her away — away from this experience that encroached, that claimed dominion. Love! — it was a sly, witching synonym.

The passionate protest of the father, of the man who gauges the meaning of another man's love, surged high in his heart.

Love? — to the child, the perfume of flowers, the adoration of her Beloved, the mystery of touch — his shy lip upon hers — a bridal veil, a dim church, his ring upon her finger, and then? — Ah, she little knew.

Then, Life — hard, cold, unperfumed — the sharp edge of reality, the step down from the throne, the hand of the husband, lover still, mayhap, but —

"Dad, dear," broke in Aylmer's voice, sweet upon his bitterness, "Dad, when you married mother — "

"Ah, your mother," he murmured.

What children they had been, he and she! How had they dared risk marriage, with his future all unmade before them?

But those early days — her sweet face at the window, watching for him in the dusk — her last kiss in the morning, which sent him forth fortified to meet the day — always, always, in his heart, the deep underlying thought of her, which sweetened struggle, glorified endeavour, rewarded achievement.

Her light step busy about the house — he could hear it still; her soft voice, tender in snatches of song, of lullaby to the children, who came and went, leaving them bereaved, with hearts that ached, but loved only the deeper.

And then at last, Aylmer — Aylmer, child of prayer, of pledge, of dedication. He could feel again the slow drag of those ponderous, midnight hours, massive with misery for him, and then — then — the child's sharp cry.

His wife's white face upon the pillow — the acid of time had but cut it ever deeper into his memory — he

had crept to her side, his strong imperious manhood melted into tenderness, spiritualized by her agony. She lay there — still, white, ethereal — eternal type of the Madonna mystically adored, but to him, in that high moment, a greater than sinless Virgin, enthroned above the passion and the pain through which alone Love becomes Life.

Ah more! — beneath the mystery, the miracle of Motherhood, he claimed the wife, the sweetheart, the one-with-him, sharer supreme of deepest, subtlest of his soul's secrets. The babe upon her breast was his, but far more, was its mother *of him*.

It grew late; the housekeeper, Sincerity Dawson, came in, and took a seat in silence, as she had done every night for nearly twenty years when her master was at home.

"Aylmer, you will read the 27th Psalm," said Forsythe.

The girl seated herself at the little table, upon which the great Bible rested. The light fell clear upon her young face.

> 'The Lord is my light and my salvation
> Whom shall I fear?"

The sweet voice quivered. It was her mother's psalm, read in the house only upon high, commemorative occasion.

> "Wait on the Lord;
> Be strong, and let thine heart take courage."

Aylmer shut the book. And a moment later, her father's voice became part with the silence, low, intense, passionately calm. Uncomprehending, yet she was thrilled by the noble simplicity of his prayer, by its sublimity of phrase, and splendour of high poetic fancy, all unconscious of its lofty form.

It was the product of a childlikeness of faith, which questioned naught where it adored — before whose enraptured gaze the pearly gates of Paradise stood wide upon an eternity of material bliss — of golden streets, crowns, precious stones, of four-and-twenty thrones, of lamps of flame amid which moved a mighty pageant of all nations of the earth, while the superb ritual of a service of the saints voiced unwearied adoration of the One who sat within a rainbow brilliance arching Eternal Majesty.

"O Lord, give unto us the morning star. Let our names be confessed before Thee in Heaven.

Reveal Thyself unto us as Thou dost not unto the world.

Come near, abide with us. The day is spent.

Grant us the gift of silence, that we may hear Thee in the tumult of life — that we may set wide the door, that Thou mayst enter in and break with us the bread of salvation.

Lord, there is the time when the dew of youth is fresh upon the brow, when the sky of life is fair with promise, when to the tender feet there are but blossoms in the way — "

The strong voice wavered — was silent.

"What a comfortable thing it must be to believe *what* you believe the way you do, Sincerity," mused Aylmer. "You see, I'm always turning things over

and wondering. And I get such curious, oh, such curious answers to the questions I'm always asking myself."

Sincerity bent forward, her eyes sharp with perplexity, fixed upon the young, eager face.

"Now father and mother — why, they believed, I suppose, that marriage was a high affair of the soul. It isn't in the least, Sin. The question of souls doesn't enter into it at all. All that I really know at this moment of the man I'm going to marry is, that he's six feet tall, that he's handsome, that he's fair, that his eyes — Oh, well! never mind his eyes, Sin — " she picked up the photo of her lover from the dressing-table — looked a long moment at it; then turned it face downward, resolute, though her fingers lingered upon it — "but you see, don't you? that I don't know anything whatever about his soul. I know that he is probably a gentleman, because he has been most expensively trained to be one, and education happened to him just as his looks did, and his clothes — not because of any merit in him, but merely because they happened to be provided for him. And yet it's just his six feet, and his eyes, and his manner, and the cut of his clothes that I — that I — love. Just as he loves my pretty hair, Sin dear, and doesn't give a hang — yes, I will say it — doesn't give a hang whether I've got a soul inside my shell or not."

"Child" — the old woman spoke slowly — "you may talk as you like, but you won't be able to escape your inheritance."

"My inheritance?"

"Ay, child. The greatest a woman can have — the power to love as your mother loved."

"But I don't want to — I don't want to. That kind of loving makes very good poetry, but very bad living. Look at dad — no one could call him happy."

"Happy!" echoed Sincerity scornfully. "Perhaps some day you'll think him happy enough. It's a great thing to have the ache of a sorrow like his in your heart."

There was silence, each thinking her own thoughts, until a moment of great emotion overwhelmed Sincerity.

"My lamb," she cried, "don't let them hurry you. Think about it, long, long. Marriage is not for to-day or to-morrow — it will be for your life. And this is all wrong. I know it. And your mother would know. There's too much injustice and bitterness behind."

"Injustice — bitterness?" The young eyes opened wide.

"Ah, my child, I could tell you. But I won't — I won't. You shall judge this thing fair." Yet for a moment Sincerity wrestled hard with temptation. "But you say, child, yourself, that you don't love him — as — as — "

"Not love my Christian?" The sweet young voice rang high. "Not love him? Oh, Sin dear, listen, listen. Love him? — why, I love him so that it's sweet — it's madness of joy — just to try to see if I can only pretend to myself for one moment that — I don't. For then, I know — I know."

There was silence a moment. Then in smothered

tone, Aylmer added: "Oh, Sin, run away, run away, dear. You mustn't see — you mustn't know — how much I love him."

The girl pushed open the door, and stepped with such faint footfall within the long, old-fashioned drawing-room, that her lover, dreaming dreams of her, did not hear.

She stood there, far from him, and in that moment of waiting, there befell to her strange consciousness of the remoteness of herself, in her untouched maidenhood, from him; of her high estate, her royal value; of the meaning to herself of the priceless gift she was bestowing unpriced upon her lover. And fear besieged her — fear of herself, of him, of all that lay before them to be lived — of the fierce noonday, of the long twilight weaving even now, mayhap, the shroud of Love's young dawn.

"Christian," she cried afraid, "Christian!"

The young man turned sharply, then paused. "Oh, Aylmer, don't stir. Don't! Dearest, I want *never* to forget you, there as you are now, in all your whiteness in the dim light, and with just that word upon your lips."

But she was beside him — she was in his arms; his lips breathing upon hers what had become the very breath of life to them.

"Think of it," he whispered, "I've been gone from you only four days, and it has seemed like eternity. Aylmer, what have you done to me? My heart was a wilderness full of voices crying: 'Aylmer, Aylmer!'"

He held a small white velvet case towards her. But she drew back.

"Oh, Christian, must you give me something more?"

"Why not?" he asked.

"Dear, you won't be angry? — but can't you see? — Oh, how I wish you were a poor man — how I wish you had nothing to give me, that I might give you all that is, that must be, worth so little to you now. I wish life with you was going to be hard for me — how can love ever be all that it might if there is nothing to sacrifice?"

The young man laughed. "Bless my soul! What a delicious bit of righteousness it is. But don't get anxious, dear. It's just possible that a little agony may come our way sometime or other, merely to remind us that we're human, but I'm hardly in the mood to anticipate that now. Dear, can't you look at them?" His blue eyes were wistful — he held the case again towards her. "They're beautiful," he added apologetically.

"Beautiful! Why, Christian, I have never seen anything so lovely."

Delicately, she lifted the slender platinum chain, set with the flame of opals and the flash of diamonds.

"The opals — they're your stone, and they're just like you. They're never the same. Sometimes they're all fire, and again they're so cold."

"Why, Christian, I'm not like that," protested Aylmer.

"Not like that?" he laughed softly. "Dear, you're

just like that. The man who loves you a month knows more of joy and pain than most men do in a lifetime. You've had a hundred moods while I've sat here tonight. And, dear, I've had but one." His voice sank low. "I love you. It's the only mood I know."

A few months later, when the blossoms lay all white upon the mists of green, they were married.

"Dad, dad," whispered Alymer brokenly, as her husband waited to take her away, "I can't leave you — I can't."

Forsythe kissed her quietly. "But you're coming back again."

But never to him. He knew it, as she could not, and his strong heart fainted within him.

Later, in the dim spring twilight of that long, long day, he went out to the quiet spot in God's Acre where the child's mother lay, and there, upon the silent sod, he found Aylmer's bridal flowers.

Ah, she was not forgotten then! In the moment of the greatest experience life had yet brought to her, the child's soul had made cry to her dead, unknown mother.

He turned homeward, comforted.

A few streets away, alone too, in his big house, sat Christie Bronsart. "I wonder, I wonder," he mused, "how it's going to work out. My son, and Forsythe's daughter!"

A confused medley of thoughts blurred through his mind; one at last, stood out, insistent. "Unto him that

hath shall be given. Unto him that hath not, shall be taken even that which he hath."

"Well, that strikes me as pretty good gospel. I took from Forsythe just about all that he had, and what I didn't take, my son has been given."

But another thought came and disturbed the moment's smile.

"I wonder — I wonder." He sighed, reflective.

CHAPTER THREE

IT was June and the early dew lay light upon the roses when Christian and his bride reached their journey's end. They had driven for miles along the smooth roads in the tender sunshine of a perfect summer day; as they drew near the little village above which the château frowned imperious, they grew silent; the spell of experience, of place, was upon them. To the girl came questionings, fast, insistent. A long line of brides had driven up this poplar-shaded road — beside them, their lords, serenely fixed in the faith that they owned the very air their vassals breathed. The bells had rung merrily from the little church tower; the straggling street had made brave show of arch and banner in honour of count and countess.

But what had been the thoughts of this proud woman and that, as each in turn had made entrance upon this lonely, mount-imprisoned stage, where she was to play her high part until life's brief day for her was done? Had she loved her lord, or had she already, in swift fear, discovered herself more surely slave than the peasant who, in the dust, curtsied deep as she passed in pageant array?

Aylmer sighed.

"Dearest — why?" asked Christian, bending towards her.

"I was thinking of all the women who have driven to their home along this road — but was it home, or was it already to their imaginings a prison?"

"Oh, it was prison enough for some of them. You'll have the rarest times getting at their histories from Mariette, the old caretaker. She's a mine of information and superstition. One of the counts about a century ago married a peasant girl, and there were fearful ructions. She was never recognized by the old count and countess, but when they died, it was her turn, and she ruled like no woman had ever ruled before her. She had a business head, and she enriched the estate by every conceivable means. But when it came her son's turn to marry, it took a princess to satisfy her, and that was her mistake, for it brought into the blood a stream of degeneracy and profligacy that has about washed out any virtue it ever possessed. But she was dead and dust long before the results of her mad ambitions became manifest."

The château fronted them, at the end of the fine, but now neglected avenue. And presently, amid a density of trees to the left, they discerned the chapel, separate from the house, but the door was locked to would-be worshippers; the path to it green with unworn grass. Before the porch two giant oaks stood sentinel in the sombre dignity of an age to which the brief lives of counts and their countesses were but as the field flower, which to-day flourishes, and to-morrow is not.

"Oh, it's beautiful, beautiful," cried Aylmer, "but, Christian, it's so sad."

"But that's just it," said the young man joyously. "Gaiety is cheap, but this stately desolation is worth a king's ransom."

As they swept around the curve in front of the house, a blaze of begonias banked close to the grey walls gave pathetic evidence of a desire to cherish some remnant of that profusion of bud and blossom of which the starved parterre had once been prodigal.

Aylmer never forgot that summer evening — the gloom of the wide, square hall, floored with slabs of black and white marble — the fading splendour of the salon, with its gilt of furniture lavishly inlaid, and the bloom of colour yet gay in rich brocade. From the walls the faces of dead and gone de Roannes looked down — men who had learnt through generations of experiment every trick of the ruler's craft — and women of that texture of spirit and flesh born in the purple; serene in the belief of their divine right to the silks and laces of existence. It seemed to the girl that their eyes were ever upon her — jealous, avenging — as she and Christian ate their first meal together upon old coronetted linen, and from silver that had done service at the banquets of kings.

Yet, light-hearted as children, they laughed, and went out together to watch from the balustraded terrace the summer night lay its benediction of darkness upon the distant mountain peaks, forever white, unchanging; upon the lake, dimly blue in the distance;

upon the wide plain beneath them stretching far, and dotted here and there with the clusters of cottages which clung together to make the tiny villages.

That night Aylmer slept in a massive bedstead, with coronet-shaded canopy; above her head a silver crucifix hung against the silken draperies; she said her prayers at the crimson prie-dieu, for under the spell of this ancient roof, her sense of identity deserted her— the blood in her veins turned blue as any de Roanne's; alone, in the bare, stately room which had harboured many a mistress of high degree, she dreamed the dreams, played with the inmost thoughts, quivered with the shy emotions which had once been the very heart-beat of some girl of kindred spirit, who had left enduring, but, to the uninitiated, invisible impress of her soul upon the place which knew her no more.

Aylmer said her innocent prayers, and put out the "bougie"; then crept in darkness to the window and looked out upon the terrace. She caught the red glimmer of her husband's cigar; its dear perfume wafted upward to her window; she followed the faint fall of his steps with seeking ear.

Ah, how she loved him! It was agony, the edge of a knife against her soul — to love like that.

Marriage — what a mystery! Her girlish imagination shrank from analysis, yet did other women — love as she did — and — yet — wonder? Love? — it was not as simple, as easy of understanding, as in her maiden heart she had dreamed it.

Ah, Christian! he passed beneath her window —

she thrilled in every nerve, that thrill that rendered her strange — an alien to herself — that weakened the very fibres of her being.

Love? — for all her gibings long ago, she had envisioned it as the answering of soul to soul.

"And it is — it is!"

She stormed upon herself.

Then in the darkness, she leaned towards him, and breathed upon the night a prayer, for him and her, husband and wife together.

When Sunday came, Aylmer went to mass in the village church — the thrall and the passion of mysticism were strong within her in these days of honeymoon. Christian laughed; he found each mood of hers adorable, and when the crude, gauntly human little service was over, she discovered him waiting to escort her home.

"Oh, Christian, it was beautiful!" she exclaimed fervently, as they sat resting half-way up the steep ascent to the chateâu. "I mean the faith these simple people have."

"But, my dear, it's not faith. It's superstition. And even their superstitions do not materially affect their practices. They still go out and lightly murder their fellow-man, and cheat themselves into believing that they can be bought out of purgatory. Their religion is a matter of dogmatized emotion—it has nothing in their minds to do with the ethical relation of man to man."

"Oh, well, I don't in the least care," said Aylmer recklessly, "so long as they set up such a picturesque relation with the Almighty."

They laughed together in the sunshine.

The days, golden in love's young glory, passed lightly by. Aylmer became an ideal chatelaine. Even Mariette, proud miser of family tradition, ceased to grudge her the use of appointments dedicated by right to loftier service. Servants were few, the life severely simple, but the stamp of an elegance of ancient lineage was upon it.

The chapel door was locked now only at night; Aylmer liked to slip in and sit and dream of the de Roannes at rest there. Next to the peasant countess lay the princess, in life divided as the poles, in death, both dust and de Roannes alike. What passion, what ardour of ambition, what frenzy of grief, what high desire, what imbecility of pomp and prowess lay here under like label!

The people in the lonely villages, clustered low beneath the purple Juras, hurried for sight of her, when carriage wheels swept the smooth road. For the long, exploring drives with Christian were a delight that never palled. The villages looked to her like pictures of themselves by a master hand. There was ever the thrifty woodpile reared high about each tiny homestead; the red geraniums crowding the scant window, the group of women washing by the stream's side; the ubiquitous hen, a-scrape and a-squawk; the loiterers about the social pump. Strange, masterful looking women, despite decrepitude — wee tots of children, grave already beneath the burden of life's cares — how oddly they impressed her at times, as neither more nor less than marionettes, gifted with almost hu-

man intelligence. She never succeeded in making herself believe them entirely real; their use of impassioned gesture to illustrate the most trival emotion but went to prove that their moods were manufactured by a clever manipulation of strings.

Long afterwards, Aylmer could recall with bitter distinctness such trifling memories of that dreamy summer — so insignificant, but so curiously persistent — the marvel of blue in the eyes of a white-smocked child phlegmatically shelling peas in a quaint old doorway; the light laugh of a girl loitering with a lad along a roadside beautified by star-stemmed convolvuli — the shiver of a handful of bluebells in the wet wind; the arrogant splendour of a single spire of thistles against a bank of green.

She learned to watch and to love the moods of the lonely Dôle, from whose summit there descended upon the vineyards basking in the sunshine of the valley, the most wondrous of mist-wreathed, writhing storms. It was awesome, the Titanic power which worked out there, before her eyes, such mysteries of transformation, such horrors of blackness upon the summer blue. The mountains seemed to her more human than the people who lived, careless of their grandeur, beneath them.

At night sometimes, she awoke and closed her window; bolted it and drew the curtain across it, strange fear in her heart of the sombre heights beneath whose giant shadows the human story was each day newly staged in weal or woe. Then in the morning she smiled, when she looked out upon the Juras

as innocent of tragedy, and as blue as the tender sky arched above them.

She was happy — Ah, so happy! Yet, one day, with her head against his shoulder, she said to Christian: "Dear, I get so afraid. How can we be, always, as happy as this? No one ever is, all the time. And I couldn't bear it, now after I have once known, to have to be less happy. It makes me afraid of everything — of going home — of any thought of change. Every night I say: 'Good-bye, beautiful day,' and then for a moment it seems as if my heart would break. Dear, don't you ever — "

"No, I don't," laughed Christian. "What do I care about to-morrow? Sufficient unto the day are the joys thereof." "Women —" he pinched her ear — "why, they're curious creatures. If they're happy they can't be content without analysing their condition to find out why they're not unhappy. Men are different. If they're in love with a woman who loves them, they know they're happy, and they're too darned glad of it to monkey with the situation."

Aylmer smiled, for the moment content.

And Christian watched her, his heart aflame. He, analyse his happiness! He had analysed his unhappiness, his loneliness, his longing for companionship, often enough. And he had dreamed — how passionately he had dreamed — that somewhere within the hidden years, the wife of his visions awaited him.

And at last, there had come to him, Aylmer — Aylmer!

"Oh, you must come and look — quick!" cried

Aylmer late that evening from the balcony. "It's so beautiful, but all in the weirdest way. There isn't anything left in the world except the château, and the ground it stands on, and you and I."

For all about them the mist swam, vague, impenetrable, shoreless. They looked out upon a world which was not. And were content, for were they not alone — together alone?

The next morning as they sat at their dainty breakfast of honey and "little breads," Mariette brought in the letters. Aylmer was soon absorbed in hers, a rare epistle from Sincerity, but she was abruptly recalled from it.

"Hang it all, Aylmer! If this isn't like Madam Bronsart! She'll be here to-night, with Vonviette and Erica Rymal."

Aylmer looked at her husband without speaking, the colour rose in her face.

"Suppose — suppose we run away," he suggested aghast.

"Oh, well, perhaps it's time we had something to put up with," said Aylmer bravely.

"Ah, but my darling, I don't want you to have anything to bear through me — not so much as the wrinkling of a rose-leaf."

They had had their honeymoon — the mists which had veiled them were lifting to let the world, unwelcomed, in upon them.

"Oh, this dear, shabby château!" exclaimed Mrs. Bronsart with enthusiasm. "Doesn't it make you

think of 'The Moated Grange,' and things like that?"

"I don't know. You see, there isn't any moat." Aylmer laughed nervously.

"Now, my dear, I do hope you aren't a matter-of-fact person," Mrs. Bronsart looked pensive. "I'm so poetical, so imaginative. You've no idea what a trial my temperament is to me at times."

"No, nor to the rest of us," interpolated Vonviette.

"And this simply sweet tesellated pavement — black and white — perfectly dear, you know, but horribly gloomy and tomb-like. And these tapestries! Vonviette, we'd really better make a determined stand and buy them at once. I wouldn't care what we paid, and I daresay we could get them cheap, if the thing is managed properly. My! What dreadful floors. The oldest part? — Yes, I daresay, but I'd soon tear them up if the place was mine. These people never do understand the artistic possibilities of a place like this. Oh, that crucifix! Isn't that the prettiest idea? It makes me feel quite emotional to look at it. I always did believe in a proper amount of religion. I do trust, my dear, that you're not a godless girl."

"I'm not sure." Aylmer struggled with laughter. "The term invites definition, doesn't it?"

"There it is —this dreadful modern spirit — always picking and turning and analysing. Definition!" Mrs. Bronsart waved the opprobrious word, with jewelled gesture, aside. "Now there's Vonviette —"

It seemed to Aylmer advisable that the subject

be changed. "I hope you will like your room, Mrs. Bronsart," she said considerately.

"My dear, anything pleases me. My tastes are the simplest. But the room's very bare, isn't it? And dreadfully faded and fusty. Are you quite sure it's clean? The linen looks centuries old, doesn't it? You might call that Mariette — dreadfully sour-tempered person, I'm afraid; quite depressing. I always require servants to look cheerful — I should speak to that Mariette about her temper, my dear, if I were you. Or perhaps I had better. One needs so much tact about things like that. Oh, I simply couldn't sleep in these sheets. So many people must have, you know — it's quite revolting to think of, isn't it? — just ring the bell for that person, my dear, and I'll have her replace this linen with my own — I always travel with sheets and things."

"But the bell doesn't ring," said Aylmer, "and really Mariette's linen is — "

"The bell doesn't ring!" exclaimed Mrs. Bronsart. "But how can one exist with a bell that doesn't ring in one's room?"

"One lives here very simply," explained Aylmer.

"Simply! My dear, yes! I adore simplicity. But simplicity is not at all the same thing as savagery. To exist without a bell and without clothes, for instance, is savagery, but not simplicity."

"Don't excite yourself, Maternal," said Vonviette soothingly. "You can doubtless be equipped with a tin pan and an iron spoon with which to afflict the household according to your judgment of its deserts.

I hope you don't enjoy a quiet life, because henceforth you won't have it," she added, turning to Aylmer. "But there are compensations, because you will find Maternal interesting only when she is exasperating."

Mrs. Bronsart smiled, vaguely assured of compliment in her daughter's remark. As the stepmother of Christian, and the mother of Vonviette, she was accustomed to regard herself as a martyr to the cause of race perpetuation, and she had for so long serenely appropriated all the virtues, that it would have been impossible for her to consider apparent criticism of herself as other than some subtle form of compliment.

Erica Rymal appeared at dinner that night in a gown that would have graced a court function. She had come prepared to play whatever rôle the exigencies of the situation might demand; her first glance at Aylmer had settled the question, for it was a rule of life with her never to seek to vanquish a rival on her own ground. And just now she felt herself peculiarly fortunate, for the part Fate clearly assigned to her was the one above all others of which she was mistress; she was born to patch and powder.

"Paris?" she said to Christian — her voice had a curious, irritating charm, in spite, perhaps because of its insinuating drawl, and the slight, interrogative inflection by which she spared herself any possible odium of asseveration — "Paris?" — Oh, it's always the same Paris isn't it? And one loves it always without exactly knowing why, doesn't one?"

Aylmer looked at her steadily, and felt suddenly the flash of positive, unconquerable aversion towards this

languid, sinuous, slow-voiced woman. Already, she seemed to appropriate Christian, and delicately, to ignore his wife. Of course, they were old acquaintances — yes, but need she insistently proclaim the fact by continual reference to days of which Aylmer had no knowledge?

"But we know very well why we love Paris," said Mrs. Bronsart firmly. "Just think of those dear people so perfectly inspired about one's clothes, actually making poor, insignificant Me" — she held herself like a dowager empress — "feel like a — Oh, a masterpiece by Phidias or somebody."

"But really, have the sculptors ever done much towards the glorification of clothes?" inquired Christian blandly.

Mrs. Bronsart ignored him, and turned to Aylmer. "My dear, I hope you approve of the nude in art," she said earnestly. "It's so right, so very right, when properly understood. An artist we met in Munich, a most charming man, explained it all to me so spiritually. I really was most anxious to talk to his model and get her point of view, but I daresay she was not at all a nice sort of young woman. And, of course, it really couldn't matter to me in the least what she thought, because 'to the pure,' you know, and '*honi soit*' and all that — so very reassuring, isn't it?"

"I daresay," murmured Aylmer somewhat rebelliously, "if one requires reassuring."

Later in the evening as she was hurrying to settle a dispute between Mariette and Mrs. Bronsart's maid,

she caught a glimpse of Christian on the terrace with Miss Rymal, and the first pang of loneliness she had known darted through her — these people all had memories in common of a past in which she had had no part.

"Vonviette, when did you last hear from Doujat?" inquired Mrs. Bronsart as they sat drinking tea under the trees the next afternoon.

"I couldn't possibly remember, Maternal. Probably he does, though, which is sufficient. And while we are speaking of him, mother mine, I might as well remark that I do not consider it fitting that you should refer to your prospective son-in-law as 'Doujat.'"

"Vonviette, what do you mean?" demanded Christian abruptly.

"Mean, brother only? Why, just that I think my honoured mother ought to refer to my betrothed — "

"Your betrothed!" The young man turned to Mrs. Bronsart. "Why has this never been mentioned? What have you let Vonviette do?"

"Really, Christian, you are most trying," said Mrs. Bronsart in a fatigued tone. "I'm sure my poor child hasn't done anything in the least unbecoming. I'm sure, Doujat — Monsieur Doujat, as you wish all that, Vonviette — is the most delightful man — such perfect manners. The very way he sits on a chair is enough to make any sensitive woman adore him, and to see him play tennis is simply the most delirious thing. He won the Derval championship in the most elegant style — it isn't in him to get all hot and clammy. And he's perfectly devoted to Vonviette, although I must say his

mother and sisters, disgusting, dried up old shabs, treated us detestably, and said the most vulgar things about *nouveaux riches*, and all that. They seemed to think he was a great catch for Vonviette, but I assured them we didn't think so at all — that we had every right to expect to do much better. I am sure, Christian, that you know, when you are in a reasonable frame of mind, that your poor father's little wife knows at least how to uphold the family dignity." And the reproached lady arranged her ineffective drab eyes in pensive contemplation of the clouds enveloping Mont Blanc.

"My poor father's little wife," began Christian patiently, "you tell me that this man, whom you have allowed to become engaged to my sister, sits enchantingly upon a chair, and wins a tennis championship with unsweating ease and grace. Now, might I inquire, just what impressed you as his particular qualifications to be the *husband* of Vonviette?"

"But haven't I been telling you, Christian? Haven't I always said to Vonviette: 'My dear, marry a gentleman at any sacrifice. He will know how to use his knife and fork, and drink his coffee agreeably, which so many, I daresay, quite excellent men do not, and which makes life a nightmare to their wives."

"I see," said Christian hopelessly. "But, after all, the moral qualifications of this — this — Doujat?"

Mrs. Bronsart sat up briskly. "Now, there, dear Christian, right there, I must take issue with you. What in the world could a nice girl like my dear Vonviette, brought up as she has been, have to do with a

man's morals? Why, the very suggestion of such a thing is intolerable to a refined woman's mind. I should not wish to know anything whatever about the morals of M. Doujat. It would be most unpleasant. I am sure he is far too much of a gentleman ever to annoy Vonviette with them. I call the admiration and regard of a Frenchman for a young girl's purity the most charming thing."

"Vonviette!" Christian spoke sharply.

The girl lifted her eyes from the book which she had been lazily reading in apparent disregard of the argument waxing hot over her personal affairs.

"Brother mine, don't vex your serious soul," she remarked kindly. "I don't in the least mean to marry the man."

"You don't mean to marry the man? Then what in thunder do you mean?"

"Don't mean anything. 'Tisn't my nature to."

"But you are engaged to him?"

"Oh, that? Yes."

"Vonviette!" Her brother looked at her steadily. Erica Rymal laughed softly.

Vonviette laid down her book. "I see I might as well explain to you first as last. I went forth in search of an emotion — it occurred to me that it would be interesting to see what it felt like to be engaged to a Frenchman — to know how he made love. It had always seemed to me that a Frenchman must have an india-rubber sort of little soul — I wanted to find out all about it." She reached for her book.

"Wait!" said Christian. His heart filled with sud-

den tenderness for this little girl, abroad in creation, sampling emotions with the cold curiosity of a cynic. "Did you find out all that you wanted to know."

"Not all, but enough. But to know just how a Frenchman loves, one should be a French girl. Henri Doujat loves me, or thinks he does, which for all practical purposes amounts to the same thing, but in making love to me he unfortunately pursues what he believes to be the American method. The result is a failure. And, as far as I am concerned, the episode is closed."

"But the man," said Aylmer, "after all, have you never considered him? If he loves you — or thinks he does, which you say amounts to the same thing — why, he will suffer, or think he does — " she smiled — "and is it quite fair to use his emotions as a mere means of experiment?"

"But, my dear, is it nothing that I afford him the opportunity to suffer? After all, it's a debatable question, isn't it, whether one is happiest when suffering, or most miserable when happiest? Henri Doujat is really having the best possible time breaking his heart over me."

Christian looked sternly at his stepmother. What a curse her companionship had been to this girl, who still seemed so fair, so blue-eyed, so innocently pink and white.

"Dear, said Aylmer a few days later to her husband "I'm homesick." She hid her eyes from him.

He looked at her a moment in silence. Then he said; "I see. I don't wonder." He stroked her hair tenderly.

"It's not Vonviette — I like her. It's — it's — Miss Rymal. I can't bear it — I can't bear her. She says such detestable things to Vonviette — to torment me — that a man's fancy for his wife, is, from the necessity of the bond which endeavours to make it permanent, the least interesting and charming to him of his attachments."

Christian laughed.

"Oh, but you mustn't laugh, dear." Tears stood suddenly in her eyes.

"I see." Christian thought a few moments. "Dear, how would you like to sail from Cherbourg on Saturday?"

"On Saturday?" Aylmer's face glowed.

"We're going off to-morrow on a little excursion," Christian casually remarked as he bade his guests good-night a few days later. "We are not just sure when we shall get back."

"Going away for several days? Oh, impossible, quite impossible!" exclaimed Mrs. Bronsart briskly. "I really could not be left alone in this dreadful place. And that Mariette — she would murder with one hand while she told her heathenish beads with the other. I have seen murder, positive murder in her eye when she looked at poor, little, defenceless me. That is what comes of being considerate to such people — they turn and rend you on the slightest pretext."

"My sainted mother, do let these young things get away by themselves for once," said Vonviette. "Good-bye," she added indifferently. "I hope you will have a delightful excursion."

Aylmer looked regretfully at the child; she must write from Paris and explain—Vonviette would understand.

But, when two days later, they climbed the gangway of the great liner, they were gravely received on board by Vonviette herself.

"I'm here first, of course, because I didn't stay over in Paris as you did," she explained a trifle tremulously. Then she laughed. "You forgot, didn't you, that I was Christie Bronsart's daughter?"

"Great Scott! Where's your baggage?"

"I haven't any, except a few details, such as my tooth-brush and a shoe-lace."

"Dear child, I'm glad you're here," exclaimed Aylmer, heartily, "but what will your mother say?"

"She will take it for granted at first that I have eloped with Henri Doujat, and that will interest and amuse her. You see, I had been considering coming with you from the first, but I did think that wasn't quite fair to you. But when I found the morning after you left that *ma mère* intended to arrange that Monsieur Doujat should come down to the chateau to stay — well, that was the last straw."

Alone, Aylmer stood and watched the faint blue line of France fade upon the far sky.

Away, forever away from her, there, beyond the dimness, lay those happy days.

Happy? — had they been that?

And what awaited her, there in the open west, where sunset-silvered clouds drifted upon the dark sea's edge?

Night fell, chill and grey, and still she stood there, wondering.

CHAPTER FOUR

"CHRISTIAN, what do you suppose Mrs. Morris wants me to do?"

"I don't see that there is anything Mrs. Morris would be privileged to want my wife to do," answered Christian with mock loftiness.

"She wants me to collect from the men in the shops for the Aged Women's Home."

"You?" Christian laughed. The idea of his wife, his elegant, exclusive wife, employed in such a cause amused him.

"You see, she thinks they would have far more interest in giving to me than to any one else. I told her I thought it was shabby to ask workingmen to give money to anything, but that quite horrified her. She argued that the privilege was their right just as it was ours."

"Do as you like, dear, of course, but my advice to you would be not to begin that kind of thing. It will lead to your being inveigled into all sorts of uninteresting and undesirable enterprises. As far as the argument goes, I think Mrs. Morris is right. Wages are high — there are no starving workmen these days."

Christian threw down his paper, and rose from the breakfast-table.

"Aylmer, what a darling you are," he said softly, as he stooped to kiss her.

She laughed — then went to the window to watch him down the street. For after three years he was — yes, he was her lover still. And those little habits, formed in the early days of marriage, had the hold of sentiment upon Aylmer. But she sighed. That talk yesterday had disturbed her. It seemed to her that she had spent three years just in learning to be a great lady — Oh, she had learnt her lesson, but was that to be all?

A few evenings later she sat alone with her husband in the library, enjoying the rarity of an undisturbed evening. The room was a delight to the eye, hued in tones of green, and furnished in the most luxurious simplicity — it was a sumptuous cell in which to cloister the world's great thinking.

"Oh, by the way — why, Aylmer, I had quite forgotten — are you going through the Works collecting, as you spoke of?"

"I've been," said Aylmer. She was sitting, listless, in front of the fire — it was a chill spring evening — her hands idle in her lap. But as she spoke she held them out before her, and looked at them, turning them this way and that, as if to let the gems upon them reveal their utmost beauty in the red flame's glow. But there was scorn in her eyes.

"Look at them!" she said. "Pretty, pretty hands. And what good are they? What good is it to anybody

that I'm here in the world with them? They can play a little and embroider a little, and they help, but only help, take care of me. That's all. It really wouldn't matter much if I didn't have them."

Then she was silent. So was Christian. But presently she added: "I was thinking when you spoke, of that great verse — *The work of our hands, establish Thou it.*— " She stood up, suddenly breathless. "Oh, think, think of the majesty of a human being who has earned the right to look his Creator in the face, and *demand* that the work of his hands shall be established!"

"Aylmer!"

She dropped back into her seat, listless again. "Yes, isn't it odd to hear me talk like this? Vonviette would say I had a severe attack of the tragics. I have. I have had since the day before yesterday. Oh, how long ago that seems!"

"What happened?"

Aylmer hesitated. "Oh, you see, I went to the Shops. I felt so out of place. I didn't even know what to wear, for I remembered that I had once heard of a poor woman's saying that she didn't like ladies to come to see her in their plain clothes — that she thought she was as fit to see their fine things as anybody. But somehow my clothes all seemed so different when I tried to look at them through the eyes of the men I was going to see. I don't know what I looked like finally."

"I know," said Christian, glad of a remark he could make.

"You! But you aren't any gauge at all." She looked at him with eyes which slowly grew tender. "You're a prejudiced juror. Well, I went to the office — I didn't drive — I didn't think it was fitting under the circumstances; yet I could scarcely crawl — I was so nervous — it seemed to me I would give a year of my life to escape."

"And why under heaven should you do a thing that you hate doing?"

"Ah, but I had to. Don't you know that there's a fierce kind of joy in making yourself do the thing you don't want to do?"

"I believe some rarefied spirits pretend to find it so" — Christian pinched his wife's cheek teasingly — "but I've consistently fitted my conduct to a principle which involved my always persuading some other fellow that he wanted to do the thing I did not."

"No, you don't always. But that's just what people like we are, have always the opportunity of doing. Well, I saw your father — he said you were at Haywood, and I was so glad, because if you had seen me you would have had to laugh at me — I felt so woebegone — but Mr. Bronsart was so kind — he always is to me, you know — he called up Monteith and introduced him to me so nicely — we shook hands and started out."

"Well?" inquired Christian presently.

"Oh, I was there, I daresay, for about two hours." Then Aylmer paused again.

"Surely the men behaved properly to you?" Chris-

tian felt himself easily in the mood for righteous angering.

"I don't know. That depends upon one's point of view, I suppose. I have been trying to discover what mine is, ever since. Oh, most did. Some were gentlemen — gentlemen of quite a fine type I thought."

"But some — some were rude?" Christian's voice was sharp.

"That's it, you see. I'm not sure. There was one man that I wished I might have seen alone, without Monteith — I wish he could have said to me all that he thought. He said a good deal as it was, and I have been trying ever since to discover whether in his place, I should not think just as he does, perhaps. I mean, whether I should not be *driven* to think as he does, even with the same mind and prejudices that I have now."

"Yes, but what did he say to you?"

"Oh, I think at first I did fancy that he meant to be impertinent. I suppose we are always inclined to think it impertinent when people like that ask questions we find difficult to answer. He asked who were the aged women in the home? I said they were deserving women who in their old age found themselves without adequate means of support. What did I mean by deserving? I said I understood that to mean women who had worked faithfully and hard during their lives. Why, then, were they without means of support? I said that of course I did not know — I supposed they had been unfortunate in one way and another. Would I explain what I meant by unfortunate?"

"The devil take the fellow's impudence!" ejaculated Christian.

"No, I don't think so," said Aylmer. "You must remember that you have not heard how he talked — nor what he looked like. I shall never forget his face — his eyes — Oh, wonderful eyes! I would have talked to him just to watch them."

Christian moved restlessly in his chair. He felt at that moment that in any other woman it would have been poor taste to observe a workman's eyes. And as Aylmer divined his feeling, she said nothing further as to the young man's appearance; she merely saw before her as she talked, the fine dark head, despite the grime — the young eager face, with its extraordinary vividity of expression, which made all other faces dull clay beside it.

"I tried to explain that by unfortunate I meant poor, and perhaps with large families to bring up, and that such women deserved the best we could give them. Give them! Oh, but he was scornful. And what did I mean by the best? Would the best I might give them do much towards satisfying me, for instance? And what right had any one to insult such women by charity. Think of the lives they had led, he said — taking in washing week after week when their husbands were out of work — scouring, cleaning, turning their hands to anything, and with half-a-dozen children at their heels. He asked me if I had ever considered that in the hard times it's the women who turn to and support the families. But then, when they're old and worked out why don't their children support

them ? I said that so often their children could not — that they had their own responsibilities. 'But you could support your mother ?' he said. 'What have you done to deserve a privilege that is denied to others ?' You see, Christian, I couldn't say anything. And Monteith got angry — he wanted to hurry me away. But I wouldn't go. The man was honest — I wanted to hear what he said."

"Oh, I daresay. But you see, Aylmer, I do not care for my wife to be subjected to a workman's honesty, however discontented it may be. These people suffer from the deep underlying dissatisfaction with life, which has marked all ages and all conditions of men. Highly imaginative spirits, poets and such like, hurl their indignation at being here amid unpleasant conditions, at their Creator; the labouring man suffers exactly the same mental disturbance, but is less discriminating as to its cause, and hurls his indignation at his employer. He strikes for higher wages, because like all the rest of us, he wants more happiness than he has got, and he blindly takes for granted that he will get in that way what men have never yet obtained by that method."

"Still, if I had a family of six children to support by taking in washing it does seem that it would make a great difference to what I know in me as happiness, whether I got a dollar or a dollar and a quarter a day. Think of it — a dollar and a quarter a day. You see, it has haunted me ever since — the thought of the women who support their families with such terrible bodily labour. And then think of me — I never know

what it is to be tired, except from the effort to get myself amused. Think of it — suppose I spend all the long years of life that may be before me, just as I have spent the last three, there will never then come for me a day when I can look up, and say: The work of *my* hands, establish Thou it."

"Do you know what I think," said Christian — he made a severe effort to speak lightly — "I think you have got into a very morbid frame of mind since you went a-soliciting for the Aged Ladies. You've picked up a burden that it's not your business to carry. These be mighty problems, the solving of which must rest upon other shoulders than yours, sweetheart. There are so many people worrying over them now-a-days, good conscientious people, whether one agrees with them or not — that my wife can well afford to leave the matter in other hands."

"Yes, it would seem so. But" — Aylmer hesitated, then she was driven on — "that was what he said was always the answer — that if a day ever came when I began to think of these things I should be told that the matter was not for me — that great wrongs can only be righted by great forces. He said that was a lie — that great wrongs call for their righting through the devotion, the sacrifice, the service of a man here, a woman there. Christian" — her tone pleaded — "he said some wonderful things. I shall never forget them. Wrong is never impersonal. The awful total of human misery which stirs us so little in the aggregate, is made up of a child's tears, a woman's anguish, a man's despair, and he told me that upon *me* — upon

me alone — there was laid the responsibility of decci sion — from the moment — the moment of my listening to him."

She paused, for she was remembering — things she must not repeat. She was back amid the clangour and outcry of machinery again — listening, while that young face held her, with its dark, demanding eyes. The beauty of the voice — how did he, a workman come by it? — he was repeating Carlyle to her. "You remember — 'Difficulty, abnegation, martyrdom, death, are the allurements that act on the heart of man.' They will act on you, if you are only worthy. Don't you *want* to be?" And for a moment after that he had looked at her, as might a prophet of old, unafraid — then had turned back to his work.

"Oh, of course, I see, the fellow is evidently a genius of his sort," said Christian after an uneasy silence. "But what interests me is to know whether he gave you anything but talk towards alleviating the distresses of the old women."

"Yes, five dollars. That quite staggered me, for I had not been getting more than fifty or seventy-five cents. Naturally, when he gave me that so quickly I felt it only polite to listen to him. But he told me that he thought the really humane thing to do would be to kill the old ladies off as the people we are accustomed to call savages do."

Christian was silent. Doubtless she had offended him. But why? Must she never be other than the gay toy, devoid of serious concern in life? Must she do her thinking alone?

Presently she said lightly: "Oh, Christian, you can't think what odd things some of the men said. One of them told me I need not expect to get anything out of him — wasn't he running an Aged Women's Home of his own, with his wife's mother and his own both under the same roof? He wished I'd get him the position of matron at the Home with quarters for the two included, for he thought he might find it easier to handle them by the quantity than by the pair. He said that I should find upon investigation that the fact that they were both still alive was ample testimony as to the perfection of his temper, and that he contemplated going into literature, as nothing that had yet been written approached the subject of the mother-in-law in the truly artistic spirit."

"Well, the fellow certainly deserves some stars in his crown," observed Christian genially. He was thankful that the conversation had shifted to a less dangerous quarter; it disturbed him to come upon traces of gunpowder in his wife's character.

"Then there was another man who told me that 'savin' yourself, young Mrs. Bronsart,' he hadn't any use whatever for the women, young or old. He had tried being the son of one, the husband of two, and the father of four, so that he was well qualified to speak, and he was sorry to tell me that he could say nothing in defence of the species. His advice would be to burn down the Home with the old ladies in it. But some of the men were so nice — they told me about their children and their wives. One of them, Tim Arkell, has an invalid wife — I said I would go

to see her. Oh, I felt so different when I came away — I felt like a real human being, akin to a whole world that I had known nothing of."

Ah, there it was again in her voice! — the serious, insubordinate note.

There was a knock; the door opened, and Forsythe came in; there was a halting shyness in his manner.

"Oh, dad, how dear of you!" exclaimed Aylmer.

"But how does it happen?"

For he came there so rarely — in his own house he was able to forget that his daughter was no longer his, but here — the taint of the Bronsart was over all.

"I've been at prayer-meeting, my dear, and as I passed — well, it seemed as if I just came in, I don't know how. And what are you two so deep in talk about to-night? Are you planning the new wing?"

"The new wing — I had quite forgotten that. I don't want anything new, dad dear — wings or anything else. I think I have already spent so much — much more than is my share, that there isn't anything coming to me for the rest of my life."

"Well, there's a good economical wife," remarked Forsythe — willing to be pleasant when he could — to his son-in-law.

"Oh, but dad, it isn't that I want to be economical. You see, I thought about that, too, as I walked home the other day" — she nodded at her husband — "it's a crime for people like us to be economical. The least we can do is to try to distribute what we have too much of and others not enough."

"Your daughter has been interviewing the men in

the shops," said Christian explanatorily, "and naturally they have enlightened her as to the injustice of economic conditions."

"Oh, I daresay; trust them," said Forsythe uninterestedly. "But what were you doing in the shops, my dear?"

The incongruity of his daughter — his daughter, always so sumptuously apparelled, from the jewelled comb in her cloudy hair to the toy of a shoe on her dainty foot — "interviewing" the men of sweat and grime in the shops, struck him as appalling.

"Collecting, dad, for one of the charities. But the men were very good to me."

"Well, what self-control it shows, that they refrained from abusing you. I suppose there was someone with you to protect you in case of violence?"

"Dad, you're not good to-night, even if you have just come from meeting."

Forsythe smiled indulgently, and leaning back in his chair, looked at his daughter with satisfied eyes. How he had suffered! — he had endured humiliation too bitter for remembrance. But the Lord had made to him atonement. The very continuance of the Bronsart name depended upon his child — his! — Ah, he had lived to see her become the most important factor in a dominant family; in the hollow of her slender hand she held the happiness of his enemy. Such was the strange requital of the years. The son in whom all Christie Bronsart's ambitions centred, depended for his happiness upon Aylmer, for the wife — Ah, she made or marred the man.

His child — his child! What unconfessed pride he took in her splendour — in the dignity with which she filled her high place. He exulted in the luxury which surrounded her — yet it was but that to which she had been rightfully born.

Yesterday, in the street, she had espied him in the distance, and had dashed down upon him, driving two high-spirited horses. "Dad!" she had cried in the voice that was so like her mother's; he turned from the man with whom he was talking, and there she was, Aylmer! She leaned down from her high seat and kissed his worn face with her sweet lips. "That's all," she said. "I had to — just had to."

He stepped back to the man, upon whom he was proudly aware of the effect of the little scene. "Pardon me — it was my daughter," he said with simplicity, but his old heart was beating fiercely.

"No, I'm not going to have any new wings, or any other luxuries this year," she repeated now. "I'm going to divide my weekly housekeeping money with about forty families — I think that would somewhat reduce things to their right proportions."

Forsythe smiled tolerantly. There were vagaries of speech and even conduct to be expected of a girl who found herself in a position to play at will with this or that theory of life. It was impossible to admit fears as to his daughter's ultimate common-sense.

Some weeks later Aylmer inquired of Monteith as to the young man who had talked with her.

"He was dismissed, ma'am," said Monteith awkwardly.

"Oh, was he?" She was silent. Then she asked: "Mr. Monteith, did my husband know of his being dismissed?"

"I — I guess so, ma'am," replied the foreman with evident reluctance.

"Why, oh why did I ask that?" she demanded of herself afterwards. "What an underhand thing of me to do! And as if I didn't know!"

But who had he been, and where had he gone?

CHAPTER FIVE

THE Bronsarts were Episcopalians of the conventional type; they assumed at stated intervals the outward appearance of inward piety in the same manner in which they applied to themselves their clothes.

To Aylmer the innate godlessness of her husband's family had been a revelation. Her father, with the fervour of a long line of Covenanters in his veins, had frequently required of her more religious experience than she could furnish; it was by the shock of contrast that she now became able to appreciate the beauty of that stern background of faith against which Forsythe's life had outlined itself. She could not remember a crisis, great or small, when the ultimate appeal had not been to that Mighty Force above human life known to her father as God. His magnificent belief in the power which kept eternal watch above him had given to his nature a dignity which linked the daily occurrences of the common lot to the sublime. In the home of Aylmer's girlhood the day had begun at the foot of the Throne; it must have taken a soul void of sympathy to scoff at the amazing intimacy, the community of interest between John

Forsythe and his Lord. His religion had given scope to an imagination which demanded for itself large place — it was a great nature, which, suffering bitterest temporal disaster, had coerced itself into accepting material defeat as spiritual aggrandisement.

Thus the girl had grown up in an atmosphere in which every act, every decision was brought to the bar of the Invisible. It was mighty training for a young, vivid imagination.

With the blood of generations of Presbyterianism staunch in his veins, it was inevitable that Forsythe should hope that by some miracle of influence, of inherited adhesion to the faith for which her forebears had died, his daughter would lead the erring Episcopalian goat into the true fold. But Aylmer gave the matter no thought whatever; she had always heard so much of religion that she was undoubtedly relieved of strain when at first she heard so little.

But now, after the most intimate experience among people who knew no God and were glad of it, the girl's soul was unconsciously athirst for a drop of that living water of which in her youth she had been given overdeep draught. Life grew thin — it showed strangely threadbare under the garish light of a vulgarizing interpretation of human destiny and endeavour.

Aylmer loved her husband; she still idealized him. Yet she had even wondered whether she idealized him for his sake — or her own. When that idea first occurred to her, it amused her — the perception of such a possibility was a tribute to her own acuteness — later, the thought frightened her. Christian was so

nearly perfect — so nearly. If only something would happen to disturb the ease, the gilded serenity of his days — to force him out into that process of evolution of which circumstance at present denied him the opportunity. His father bore alone the heavy responsibilities of the business — it was his nature to do so, and his son had been trained not to dispute the privilege with him.

Yet she was tolerant, for in her heart there was the suspicion common to the species Wife, that it was idle to expect that her husband should appreciate the loftiness of her particular ideals. A man? — why, he was on a lower plane; one could love him devotedly and yet admit that. Nay, it was because one loved that one perceived it — sometimes in sorrow, and sometimes in tenderly humorous acceptance of his inevitable limitations — being man that he was.

To Christian his affection for his wife was as the air that he breathed — he neither analysed nor idealized it. In the three years that she had been his, she had given him many uneasy moments, but no miserable ones. He had at times a vague impression of depths in her unknown to his knowledge of women, but like most happy husbands he was without curiosity concerning them. And as there was never any direct conflict between them, he grew into an easy belief in himself as benevolent, non-interferent. Unquestionably, between a woman of such strong character as Aylmer and a man of less wisdom than himself there would have been collision — he pitied the men who failed of the tact to accommodate their convictions to their

wives' moods. In a relation as appallingly reciprocal as that of marriage, the man was surely a fool who would not exercise his ingenuity in keeping the woman who was his wife in love with him. He had everything to gain by that condition of her emotions, and nothing to lose.

As to the absoluteness of his wife's affection for him, a doubt never entered Christian's mind. Aside from the question of that inevitable affinity between them, dear to the lover's imaginings, it was impossible to his interpretation of Aylmer's character to conceive of her in the wife's relation to a man she did not love.

When at times he became conscious of a certain restlessness beneath the surface, he soothed his fears with the hope that they would some day have a child to absorb her superfluity of aspiration. It was indeed an empty life, as she had so often said to him — that of a woman of the leisured class. But he never spoke to her of a child, lest she construe his remarks into an expression of regret at their having none.

And Aylmer, though she sometimes felt almost hurt that he seemed to care so little, was quite content to let such a sleeping dog lie. Christian loved her absorbingly; that satisfied; so be it. And the thought of a child awed — almost shocked her. What a strange, what a terrible experience for a woman — she was satisfied to remain a girl in her ignorance of it. So many of the women of her acquaintance who had married and had children seemed to lose grace and delicacy, mentally as well as physically.

Husband and wife — they loved each other and knew it — they assured each other that their hearts asked nothing from the world without. He never thought of her as possible or desirable, other than just what she was — she imaged him continually as all that her ideal demanded — if — !

It was the eternal difference between the man's love and the woman's.

Yet though the Bronsarts had no faith that could be described as such, Christie Bronsart "ran" the church to which he belonged as inevitably as he ran every other organization in which he had an interest. To be its heaviest contributor made slight demand upon his pocket-book, and put a pressure upon more pious and more parsimonious brethren which caused him much satisfaction at times. "Salvation's free, but it costs a pile to offer it," was a remark of his when heading a subscription list with a sum calculated to make the next man wince.

It was therefore a foregone conclusion that when the Church of the Ascension was in need of a new rector the selection should rest ultimately with Christie Bronsart.

"Yes, but this fellow baffles me," he said to his son one afternoon, as they sat together in his office just before closing time. "Oh, he's the man for the place — that's settled — but I feel that I know less about him than I ever knew of any man to whom I offered a seven thousand dollar salary."

"Seven thousand? I thought you had boiled it down to five." Christian looked at his father in surprise.

"We had. That's one of the funny things about it. You see, he led the noon meeting of the Y. M. C. A. to-day — we didn't want him to preach on Sunday — Hanscombe warned me that if the people once heard him preach we'd never be able to hold them — they'd have him whether the committee approved or not. But we did want to hear how he'd handle the sort of crowd that goes to that kind of meeting. Well, sir, I went to hear him — never go near the place — that white-livered secretary makes me sick — well, by Christopher! Oh, you'll have to hear him to understand — but I don't know what it is he *says* — and 'tisn't because he's got any fixed up way of saying it. Oh, maybe he has, too — he's as quiet — I expect there's a good deal of cheap shouting in that place as a rule — and he has a wonderful voice — great asset for a parson, that; but 'tisn't that theatrical kind of quiet, and that tricked up elocutionary sort of voice either. Oh, I don't know — the quiet's in the man."

Bronsart got up and paced the office restlessly — his son watched him with amusement, his father's frame of mind being too unusual to be ignored.

"Saw Forsythe there — guess he generally is when he's at home. Say — religion's a great thing — do you know it? — if those fellows only knew how to advertise the goods. This chap does. Bless your heart, I just knew all about the way Forsythe was feeling — he was all a-quiver, I could see that, and for the first time since I've known him I thought perhaps he wasn't as big a fool as I had supposed. I tell you the kind of thing that'll take hold of an every-day man,

and make him feel like an archangel isn't to be despised."

"You'll soon be going to the mourner's bench yourself at this rate," observed Christian.

Bronsart laughed enjoyingly. "Sounds like it, don't it? I tell you when it came to his prayer — well, if he was in business he'd have to take out a patent mighty quick on his method, but I guess the spirit of man can't be imitated as easily as the work of his hands. That prayer — Gee! you could have heard a feather fall. He just talked — Oh, Lord, no! he didn't, but he gave you the impression that he was all alone with — Oh, kind of like Moses in the burning bush my mother used to read about when I was a boy. Well, by Christopher, I bet it would have given you the most magnificent creeps to listen to it. Oh, that prayer wasn't any bazaar of all nations — it didn't rake in every country on the map and the heavens above and the earth beneath and all that rot — 'twas just a mighty solemn conclave of us two and no more."

"Yes, but what did the fellow *say?*" demanded Christian. "You know with all due respect to you, father, there's a pretty wide streak of the woman in your make-up when it comes to some things. You can get the better of any man or bunch of men you ever stood up to, but that's a fact just the same."

"Say, did you suppose I wasn't on to that?" Bronsart looked quizzically at his son. "I guess I had an understanding with my mother before I was born that there wasn't to be any more of my father in my mental

make-up than circumstances demanded. And I tell you, time has justified my faith in that old mother of mine. Many's the fellow I've got the better of because just at the critical moment I saw him with a woman's eyes. Given a man, my son, and he's never the worse for the woman in him. My poor old mother! Lord, how she struggled to get standing-room on earth for me. If she'd lived there wouldn't have been anything too good for her under this canopy."

Christian pondered. This was a rare mood in which to discover the Chief, and the man who had made the prayer was clearly responsible for it. Evidently he was an artist in his line.

"He's a fine tall fellow," continued Bronsart with a change of tone — "dark, and with an eye that's got flames in it somewhere, and there's that kind of style about his cut, if he *is* a parson. Oh he's a damned aristocrat with his lofty airs, but that'll take with the women — and his smile! — Oh, it's a cute smile — that'll please them, too.

Well, when the meeting was out I took him to lunch at the Imperial — he's human — eats just like a sinner — drinks, too, but I hope that may escape general notice. Oh, he was interesting — he knows how to talk even to a fellow like me, but at the end of the hour I felt I hadn't got anywhere with him, but that he knew all he wanted to about me. Oh, he's going to be the rector of Ascension, but I believe in my bones I shall live to regret the day."

"Then why have him?" asked Christian in surprise.

Bronsart snorted. "Just because in the providence of human affairs it's the nature of the wisest man to make a fool of himself once in so often, my boy. I'm it to-day. That's why I offered him seven thousand. It seemed to me while we were discussing the situation at Ascension, that he was demanding something of me. I couldn't make out what. I thought at last perhaps it was the money, and before I knew quite what I was doing, I said: 'Of course for you we intend to make the salary seven thousand.'"

"What did he say to that?"

"Say! He just looked at me — looked as if he wanted to scorch the hair off my head right through my face. I felt damned queer. You see you never can tell what a man 's fool enough to think he's worth, but even a fool has his feelings, and I've never found that it paid to stick pins into them, let alone the quantity of honest sweat it takes to get a pin through a fool's hide to begin with. Well, when he'd done his looking he said in that way of his: 'It won't take much to keep me, Mr. Bronsart.' Now, just what did he mean by that, do you suppose?"

Christian shrugged his shoulders.

"Just after that Wardrope came in. He was enthusiastic — complimented Boothroyd, you know how — said he'd given the meeting the Gospel, the pure Gospel — you know that sort of slop talk. It seemed to sicken Boothroyd — he gave a kind of moan, and stood up suddenly, and said: 'Oh, Christ! the Gospel! You want that?' Wardrope was quite disturbed. He's been in here since — wanted to know if that was

a prayer or a swear. I said: 'Oh, Lord!' and told him to get out."

"Well, it sounds problematic anyway," remarked Christian. "There's one thing, though. I hope he'll stick to his text and leave the labour question alone. I hope you won't find you've got a pulpit agitator on your hands."

"No, no!" exclaimed Bronsart. "I sounded him on that. Oh, he's one of these mystical fellows that aren't practical enough to get down to business."

"Well, if you're sure," said Christian doubtfully. "There was Braid, really getting his salary out of you, and never done with his little flings. It's a cheap way to get popularity with the crowd, and that's what most of the preachers are after these days — and their congregations, too. Any sort of song and dance goes as long as the parson gets a crowd. But incidentally, these men in the pulpit can make things hot for us. And this fellow — oh well, you say he's safe. But it's getting to be quite unfashionable to feel sure that anything you've got is your own."

"Well, I guess I know pretty well what's mine," said Christie Bronsart grimly. His thin jaw set a tense line about his face.

Some one whistled outside. "It's Vonviette." Bronsart locked his private desk, and the two men went out together.

The girl smiled down upon them from her high seat in the cart. "Climb in!" she commanded. "I came for you."

"What a delicate attention!" gibed her father.

"'Pon my word, Von, I appreciate the privilege of driving through town with such a stunning looking girl as you are."

"It's a mere matter of clothes," she answered calmly. "I've been much depressed this afternoon by observing that almost any woman is better looking than I am, though it's difficult to suspect it. There! see that girl on the curb?" — she drove slowly — "she'd be a raving beauty if she wore my clothes."

"Well, don't worry about it."

"Oh, I'm not. It's all a vain show. I'm part of it, willy-nilly. So is the girl. She's the shadow and I'm the high-light — we're both dependent on each other for effect in the picture. It's very interesting. Because the effect would be ruined if one grew sentimentally considerate of her feelings, and arrayed her like unto this proud bird."

"Child, how you do talk."

"Yes, don't I? And that is curious, for being the daughter of my mother, you would naturally expect me to be dumb — a nice example of the law of reaction. Now Maternal never seems to have got over her first surprise and delight at discovering that she was a toy that could talk. Her greatest mistake has been in taking seriously what the toy said."

Father and son laughed. "Thank you. It's agreeable to have one's wit appreciated," said Vonviette gravely. "Oh, by the way, I met a new man to-day. I've been looking about for some time for another world to conquer. It's getting serious, Papa Bronsart. I'm twenty-three and without prospects. I'm fast ap-

proaching that place where it will be as easy to rub the bloom of youth off me as if it were the commercial article. And you're doing nothing whatever about it — you!" She gave her father a left-handed tap with her whip. "You act as if you positively don't care whether I ever enter the married state or not, heedless parent."

"I don't," said Bronsart lazily enjoying her. "It has always appeared to me though that you were doing all that was necessary yourself — working overtime, in fact. Don't believe there's a marriageable man within a hundred miles of this town that you haven't pestered into proposing to you. The Lord knows it couldn't have been because they wanted you — it always struck me that they figured it out as being the only possible way of getting quit of you. They knew that after you once found out that you could have them, you'd stop chasing them. It's like the street-car a man can't catch. He acts about it just as if it was the only car on earth on its last trip. And that's the way with some women. They act as if any man was the last and only one, and it's mighty flattering to the man and an awful shock to his nervous system when he discovers one fine day that the earth is round, and there are a few men on the under side."

"Hearken to the philosopher!" mused Vonviette. "Your remarks on women and men, my parent, betray an observation almost equal to my own. I had a delightful time at the reception at Mrs. Leach's today — that accounts for the particular splendour of my rags, by the way. It occurred to me while I was

exchanging lies with a lot of women that I would lay them out in lots — those that had souls, and those that hadn't. You can't imagine how exciting such a gathering becomes viewed from that standpoint. There was Aylmer — I disposed of her at once." Vonviette turned to her brother on the back seat. "You see, to-day she looked just like a soul abroad unawares in flesh. And she had a beautiful gown on, too."

The men laughed again. "You mean that with such a gown, she should really have betrayed herself superior to the possession of a mere soul," observed Christian.

"Precisely, my brother. I don't know another woman who wouldn't have. I wonder how she ever came to marry you, Christian. The Bronsarts are of the order Papilionaceæ — she's not. I looked at her today, and had the feeling I've often had about her — that she's here just because she's on the way somewhere else; and most people — take Mrs. Leach" — the girl shrugged contemptuous shoulder — "she's only fit for the life she leads here. She makes me think of a canary — strip off its feathers, and you'd never get them on again — there'd be nothing there to stick them to — she's all outside, just like the canary."

"What wisdom for twenty-three!" laughed Bronsart.

"But those Forsythes" — she turned to her brother again — "they stand for something that we Papilionaceæ don't know anything about. There's Aylmer's father — think of the majestic nature of his dissipations!"

"Dissipations!" echoed Christian.

"Yes, dissipations. That's what it really is of course. But don't you think that a man who takes his spree out in prayer and Bible reading is after all on a higher plane than the one who takes it out in beer, though the impulse that drives one to prayer and the other to drink springs, no doubt, from precisely the same source."

Bronsart shouted. "I just wish Forsythe could hear you."

"Oh, I shouldn't a bit mind saying that to him," remarked Vonviette composedly. "I had a long talk with him the other day. In fact, I might as well tell you that we discussed this very point. I wanted to find out whether he had any breadth of mind at all. Well, he has. My, how he talked." She broke off suddenly. "Papa Bronsart, I wonder how you talk to stunning girls when you get off all by your lonesome — out from under my watchful eye."

"Oh, I've got little ways of my own, too — like every man, even Forsythe apparently, when there's a woman in it."

"Yes, I'll warrant you have. And after this I shall see to it that you are more rigidly chaperoned in the future than you have been in the past."

The moments when his daughter chaffed him were the happiest that came into Christie Bronsart's starved life. It was the highest expression of tenderness that he ever got from the creature that was dearest to him.

"Why, Papa Bronsart, I don't believe you under-

stand Mr. Forsythe at all. He's the most delirious combination of saint and sinner."

"Sinner!" echoed Bronsart. "Never!"

"There it is! You see, it always takes a woman to understand a man. Men are blind idiots when it comes to comprehending the stuff they're all made of. Why, there's an absolutely frivolous streak in Mr. Forsythe. And yet he'd rather go to the stake than tell what he considered a lie."

"That's so," agreed Bronsart. "You see, Christian, long ago — time of that old affair, he might have saved himself, I do believe, if he'd have bought off Ryerson. I couldn't have done the trick without Ryerson — at any rate not without no end of scheming — and Ryerson got frisky about standing by me — his conscience bothered him about that, but it wouldn't have kicked at letting himself be bought off by Forsythe — he'd have got around that easily by persuading himself that it was a most meritorious thing to save Forsythe from the clutch of the evil one, meaning me. But do you think Forsythe would? He'd go to the wall instead. 'Twouldn't have been according to his idea of honour. Honour! Gee! Where'd I be to-day if I had stopped at every corner to take that into consideration?"

"There you are, Christie Bronsart," said Vonviette. "Of such are the morals of the Papilionaceæ."

"I daresay, my fine daughter," returned Bronsart unconcerned. "And if it wasn't for those selfsame morals you wouldn't be sitting up here in this cart with those high-priced rags on."

"I wonder what difference that would really make to me. Of course it will shock you, but it has sometimes occurred to me that there might be compensations in poverty. The privilege of wanting something you couldn't possibly have, for instance."

Her father laughed. "Well, I guess that privilege isn't coming your way in any hurry," he said tenderly.

But Christian took up the dropped thread. "That old affair" — he began tentatively — "Somehow I never have got the straight of that."

He spoke in spite of himself. For he had never wanted to know "the straight of it." Nor did he now.

"Why, Christian, it was just the simplest thing — and easier then than now, for fifteen — twenty years ago, men weren't watching each other like hawks, the way they have to do now. It was like this: Forsythe had all the agricultural machinery business in this section. He'd begun small, and worked up a local business which kept extending. His stuff was well made — we couldn't persuade the farmers that ours was better — of course it wasn't — 'twasn't as good. Forsythe had got the thing down to a fine art, but I hadn't had time yet to do that — I was too busy getting in on things. But already I controlled so much capital — I had my agents all over, and was doing three times the business Forsythe did. But it galled me to think I couldn't get the market on the spot. You see I had begun then buying up and driving out of business the small fry, but I'd never attacked anything as big as Forsythe. But the time came when I did. It

wouldn't work. The man didn't want a competence and a quiet life. He wanted work, and I suppose every plough that went out of his factory stamped *Forsythe*, was a matter of pride to him. He just kept on sawing wood — extending his business every year, and building bigger shops. Well, it happened that he had borrowed a hundred thousand dollars from Lamont — in order to push things. Lamont was well pleased — the rate of interest was first-rate — that was all he wanted, and Forsythe paid off steadily every six months when the note became due. Of course, it ended in my buying up that note, and directing the bank to collect the amount. That was where Forsythe should have taken care of Ryerson's conscience. The next time Forsythe went to the bank with his interest and ten thousand dollars for Lamont, the axe fell. It was the height of the manufacturing season — Forsythe's credit was strained to the limit, because he had realized that he had reached the place where he must take advantage of every opportunity if he meant to hold his own. Well, my boy, we wiped him out. We didn't give him time to think, and it seemed anyway as if he couldn't. It was done so quick and so clean that he was mentally paralysed. His wife was so ill, too. Pshaw! I hate to think of that now. I didn't know it at the time."

"Oh, Papa Bronsart!" murmured Vonviette.

"I know, my daughter, I know. But at the same time I'm very glad I didn't hear about that until afterwards, for I can tell you it was no time to let sentiment get monkeying with business. You see, Chris-

tian, we had a writ issued and a liquidator appointed before Forsythe had time to turn round."

"But his business was absolutely solvent?"

"Solvent? Well, I should say so. If it hadn't been, we shouldn't have been doing the worrying. But a man's credit is the most ticklish thing there is. Twenty-four hours after we attacked him you couldn't make a man believe his assets were worth talking about. It was the funniest thing you ever saw — worked out just the way I planned to beat the band. But it made me mad — to hear blame fools of business men talk about Forsythe and his failure. Forsythe never failed — he was simply driven out of business by a trick, and a damn mean one, too, if I do say it myself. But business is not business — it's war."

"Oh, Papa Bronsart, I think that was disgraceful — I feel ashamed."

"It was awful," exclaimed Bronsart cheerfully. "It was enough to make a man curse God and die. And I guess Forsythe just about did die, but I'll bet my hat" — he paused a moment — "say, it's a strange delusion that can make a man take a blow between the eyes like that, and look up at the sky, and say: 'Thank you, sir,' as it were."

"Papa Bronsart, that's where the human canaries and the butterflies show up as pretty poor specimens. I don't think I like us very well to-day," said Vonviette.

"All the same, my girl, you wouldn't like things any other way. I tell you from the day I beat out Forsythe,

I've never had a set-back. That was the turning-point. Everything big has come my way since, but I've always pitied Forsythe. He was no fool, but I've heard fools call him one. He had to get out of my way, that was all. But his wife! Gee! I hate to think of that. I guess she was just about as sweet a woman as ever lived — good deal like your mother, Christian. You see, I never even knew she was ill — first thing I heard — she was dead — dead, mind you, just when that man needed her most."

Christian muttered under his breath.

"Oh, it was bad. I just thrashed about for days, wondering what I could do. It ended in my offering Forsythe the travelling managership for the West. Oh, that was a great stroke for us, of course. He took it I suppose, because he was too bewildered to do anything else, and I guess he had to go to work or go mad."

"Well, here you are, Christian," said Vonviette. "And there's Aylmer looking for you at the window. I wonder how much she knows."

"Oh, nothing, nothing," said Christian hurriedly. "She never must. You see, she's a Forsythe."

CHAPTER SIX

"MY dear Aylmer," sighed Mrs. Bronsart, "I have just dropped in to have a quiet little talk with you. If you weren't our dear Christian's wife — well, of course then I shouldn't be talking to you at all, should I? — not that I mean by that — there! you see how sensitive I am — I'm always imagining that some one's feelings are hurt — though why that should worry me — isn't it too absurd? Still, facts are facts, aren't they, dear? though Mr. Bronsart never will see it."

Mrs. Bronsart threw off her long lace coat, and sat down with a pensive air. "Yes, dear, I'll take a cup of tea — very, very weak — my poor organization is so delicate, and I get so little sympathy — except from our dear, our beloved Mr. Boothroyd. He understands me — I feel it. My dear, I'm hardly conscious of the need of speech when I'm with him."

"How very interesting!" exclaimed Aylmer.

"Interesting? Dearest Aylmer, you're so literal, aren't you? It's not at all interesting. It's mysterious. And that's what I appreciate so about our dear rector — he's never literal, my dear. And that's where everybody is making such a mistake about him. Now you

see, when I said to him yesterday that I intended to devote my life to the dear poor, he understood me at once. He said: 'Mrs. Bronsart, of course you don't mean that you are actually going in among those abandoned people — you mean that you will envelop them with your sympathy and your prayers.' Beautiful idea, wasn't it, my dear? So delicate. And he said that he appreciated my self-sacrifice, but that he feared the poor would not — that his experience of them had been that they cared very little for prayers and sympathy. But I said to him: 'Mr. Boothroyd, I know all about their ingratitude, but I shall not allow it to affect me. I *shall* love them. I *will* do it.' It's so sweet, isn't it — the new thought?"

Aylmer found the abruptness of this appeal somewhat disconcerting.

"Sweet? Yes, almost cloying sometimes, don't you think?"

"Oh, my dear, no! I see that you have not grasped its depth or you would never say that. I know all about it. You know I took that soul-culture course under Madame Delphidius — such a sweet woman, divorced from a gross, uncomprehending husband — and it was very intense. There were only four of us, you know — it was so very expensive — exclusive, I mean — and we all had to put on violet gowns when we got there, and the room was all violet, curtains, and walls, and woodwork and floors. I forget now just why, but there was a soul-reason of course, dear. I remember Madame told us about a man who tried living in an all red room to see if he would go mad,

and he did — don't ever do that, Aylmer, though I suppose the poor man was sensitive like me. But aren't all these wonderful experiments in the interests of science too touching? I've always thought I should like to die like that."

"You mean going mad in a red room? Yes, that might serve the interests of the human race," said Aylmer mildly. "But there seem to be plenty of people able to accomplish the trick without a red environment."

"There it is," sighed Mrs. Bronsart. "So few people realize the hidden meanings of life — they never go below the surface. Dear Mr. Boothroyd feels that acutely. There's Mr. Bronsart. He doesn't grasp the depths of Mr. Boothroyd's nature in the least. He said quite uncomfortable things about our dear clergyman at breakfast this morning. He called him a firebrand. I was quite hurt. I'm sure his sermon on Sunday was simply ideal. 'All ye are brethren' — isn't it a pure thought?"

"But why did Mr. Bronsart call him a firebrand? What did he mean by that?" Aylmer sat alert.

"Oh, my dear, he didn't mean anything. He merely likes to annoy me. And you would suppose, wouldn't you, that he would be pleased to see me taking such a deep interest in religion, but he isn't in the least. You know to my mind there's something so charming in a woman's being religious — French women understand that so much better than we do, but I think perhaps that's something to do with their confessors, don't you? Though I don't in the least see why."

Aylmer laughed suddenly. She was thinking of Mrs. Bronsart's infatuation for this young, dark-eyed, deep-voiced dispenser of the gospel of brotherhood — she wondered how he enjoyed it.

Just then Vonviette came in with Christian. "Now, Maternal, what are you here for, when you know you ought to be at home. There's Papa Bronsart over there just stamping, and he wouldn't let me 'phone to try and locate you. He said you were probably at the church attending some meeting for the Propagation of Bibs among Damned Heathen Babies. Oh, yes, I reproved him, and then he told me that if I saw you hanging around anywhere with the parson, I was to tell you that he had instructed O'Brien to finish your room in magenta."

"Dear, dear! What an outrage! I shall really have to leave you at once, Aylmer." And Mrs. Bronsart departed wearing an air of sculptured patience.

Vonviette sighed. "Come, sister, I'm in need of a tonic. I've been overworking my grey matter trying to think out profound things to say to Father Boothroyd."

"Is that what you call him?"

"Why, naturally — for the best of reasons — I see how it irritates him. An aureole is a picturesque affair, but it gets dreadfully in the way of a man's temper at times. Father Boothroyd is a young person of ideals, of course—he finds it interesting and effective to be such."

"Vonviette, don't say that kind of thing." Aylmer spoke sharply. "You don't know anything about Mr. Boothroyd."

"No, sister," rejoined Vonviette calmly. "But do you?"

The colour flamed in Aylmer's face. Mrs. Bronsart's sentimental excesses and Vonviette's pose of airy detachment from any serious interest in life proved suddenly unbearable to her.

"I have good reason to suppose I do," she retorted impetuously.

Instantly, she felt Christian's quick look upon her; she wished that she had not been betrayed into such a speech.

And when his sister was gone, Christian said almost immediately: "Aylmer, what do you mean when you say a thing like that about Boothroyd?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing," she said wearily, lifting her hands above her head. "But I get so tired of all this talk about him. Even old Mrs. Oliver said to me on Sunday morning in such a triumphant way: 'This is what comes of preaching the Gospel in its simplicity, Mrs. Bronsart,' quite as if I were an enemy of the Gospel. I just said: 'Yes, Mrs. Oliver, but is this all?' And that's it, Christian. Do you think for a moment that a crowded church means anything to that kind of man — that that's the success he is working for?"

"Well, it's all he need worry about," replied Christian. "He preaches great sermons — they *are* great, though I don't know why — and he sticks to his text — he leaves the labour question alone, as he said he would, and that's all we want of him."

"Hasn't it ever occurred to you that his sermons

are great more by reason of what he implies, than of what he says?"

"Aren't you getting rather subtle, dear?"

"Probably I am. But do you think — can you think — that that man is going to place the final emphasis upon the abstractness of the truths he is preaching now with such art that even people like Mrs. Oliver are conscious that something has got hold of them, though they don't in the least understand what?" She looked towards the door — the maid ushered in a visitor. "Oh, Mr. Boothroyd, we were just talking about you."

The young man came forward quickly, his serious face breaking into "the damned cute smile" that Christie Bronsart had reckoned as one of his most valuable assets.

"How delightful to find you both here," he said as he shook hands. "To tell you the truth, I'm starved for the sight of a man. I've been calling on women all the afternoon — it's debilitating."

"Well, then it's too bad I can't stay. But at any rate you will have spoken to a man. I have an engagement with my father at five — we're to drive out and look over that ground at the east end — he's thinking of it for the hospital site."

"Indeed," said Boothroyd.

Aylmer was instantly conscious o. an edge in the young man's voice. Christian talked on, outlining Christie Bronsart's plans; Aylmer watched the two men. There was this man — by profession, the saver of men's souls — how much she knew about him, how

unsparingly she had analysed him. She was aware that there had grown up between them in the year that he had been in Weston an intimacy that would have amazed her husband — it amazed herself. She looked at Christian and felt tender contempt for the innocent self-absorption which denied him clearer vision of her nature — that he could be less than satisfying to her on all sides had never entered his young, easy mind. Marriage had by now taught her perilously much; she knew that of the two, hers was the stronger nature, and she feared that knowledge. In a girl with a dangerously able mind, the unknowingness of youth had been displaced by experiences which she had analysed unsparingly, with a naïvely confident belief in her power to control the effect upon herself of such investigation. But of late she had at moments — doubted.

"I have just come from Mrs. Arkell's," Boothroyd said to her after Christian had taken his departure. "She is suffering terribly to-day — it upset me completely. In the ten minutes that I was there I wondered how I dared say one word to her in the face of the crime of injustice that her life has been. To think of such years of torture just owing to a doctor's indifference to a poor, common patient."

"Oh, but she told me yesterday that her life had been all different since you came. She said you never went away without leaving her believing that somehow it was all joy to suffer as she does."

"Did she?" His face shone for a moment — then clouded. "What else can one tell her? If I could only

be sure of it — as sure as I make her. Janie Neilson was there to-day. She followed me out and said to me: 'Then you believe there's a God up there, do you? Well, you just give me the chance once to talk to Him, and I'll undertake to tell Him a few things about His way of running a universe that'll maybe jar Him a little.' She was beside herself to-day. I suppose something has gone wrong with her boy again — I must find out to-night."

"I wish I could do something for her," said Aylmer wistfully. "But she told me once that nothing good had ever come to her by right, and that she won't have what doesn't."

"I don't blame her," said Boothroyd curtly. "I don't see why she should be further demeaned by accepting what it would be no sacrifice to you to give. One has to earn the right to help one's fellow."

Aylmer coloured deeply; her lip quivered. "Then what did you mean by your sermon last Sunday?" she asked with the tremulousness of anger in her voice.

"Did you think I meant that sort of thing — cheap charity like that?" he demanded incisively.

"No, I did'nt," she flamed back at him. "I knew exactly what you meant. I always have — ever since you came." She stood up, her excitement suddenly too great for her to remain sitting. "You think no one knows about you. Well — I do."

He looked at her coldly.

"Two years ago — the day I collected," she added, in broken phrase.

He stepped back and was still silent.

"Why, did you — can you have believed that I — didn't know? Why, I always supposed you knew I knew." She felt a biting disappointment.

When at last he spoke, it was to say a thing she would never have expected from him. "Don't you know that a man, if he knows anything, would always rather deal with a woman who can't keep a secret than with one who can? Do you know why?"

"What an odious thing to say!"

"Don't you know that I would rather that you would go out to-night and tell every one in Weston what you know — " he hesitated, then added: "It would be death to my plans, and yet — "

He was silent again. He was deeply perturbed. Suddenly, to discover his secret in the hands of a woman — and a woman who would never, never reveal it — the sense of obligation galled — humiliated.

"What can it matter — that *I* know?" she asked, bewildered.

"Oh, but it does — it does," he answered impatiently. Then he looked at her. "I'm afraid I've been rude. I didn't mean to be, of course. It's my old fault, cropping out again — I can't bear to have my plans interfered with — even by just thinking that some one else knows of them. But after all, it's you" — he smiled at her — "why, how could I know you as I do, and not know that you knew. What an unpardonable dullard."

She smiled, too, though she found it difficult. Her knowledge of men was suffering enlargement.

But presently she rallied, and ventured a question. "Tell me — why did you come here? Why did you go into the shops? And where did you go when you left here? And what are you going to do now? Oh, do you think I don't know because I ask that? You are going to make no end of trouble — for us." She drew away from him.

"Am I?" He thought a moment. "Listen! You shall judge. You shall tell me what you think I ought to do. It's like this. Two years ago the Bishop talked to me about the Church of the Ascension — about its deplorable condition — he wished me to take charge of it. I said, No; that I knew nothing about the conditions of life in this factory town — that I had no right to preach the laws of living to people unless I knew their difficulties—their temptations. We discussed the situation exhaustively — at last I came here. I found work. For six months I operated a little machine in the Bronsart shops — for six months I made the same stroke with my right hand thousands of times a day. At the end of the first week I thought I should go mad. At the end of a month I knew just how a man feels when he becomes mere brute force, automatic, unending, forever grinding. I no longer thought about anything. I did my day's work — ate my supper, and went to bed to sleep like a dead man. The memory of it is a hideous nightmare to me. And it must be remembered that I was not working as the men about me were. For me, there was deliverance ahead — for them it was a life sentence. Then one day, you came into the shops — " he paused, looked at her steadily,

and went on — "God! how terrible it seemed to me — to see you radiant, smiling, gracefully condescending, full of the charm and beauty of cherished womanhood — a joy to look at, to be near for a moment — why, those rough men felt it just as I did — the allurement of silks and laces, of faint perfume — I never forget it — I can shut my eyes and call it all back — the thick hot smell of the grit and the grime of the factory, the maddening thud of the machines, and myself, sweating, sick of soul and of body — wondering, always wondering what was it all about — what was the answer to the mighty human problem. And then, a sudden breath, a sweetness as of rain upon the grass — the touch of Monteith upon my arm — a silken stir, a soft voice — and you! You can't understand what that was to me — you belonged to my class — for a moment I longed to drop my work and walk away with you into the life of ease and decency I belonged to. But I did not think that long. For I looked at you and it came over me what a crime you were."

"A crime!" echoed Aylmer. Her veins flushed hot — this man went far.

"Yes, a crime. There you were, backed since you were born by all that money could do to enhance your charm as a woman, tricking the money out of the pockets of men who had helped furnish you with your dainty raiment, but who had never known a man's satisfaction in seeing their wives or daughters arrayed as you were."

"Please go on," said Aylmer. "This time I want to

hear the very worst you can say to me. If any one thinks me a criminal I need to understand why."

"You are not a coward, at any rate," remarked Boothroyd. "I knew that, that day in the shops."

"Oh, but I am — I have never been happy since that time — not what I call happy. I have never been *sure* since — there has always been a question in the background. And I have done my best to dodge it."

"We all do — it is not to be expected that you should not. The only question that matters, is, how long will you dodge it. When do you mean to face it? Life is not long — it passes." He waited for her to speak.

But sudden revolt flamed in Aylmer's eyes. "Why should I? Do you know what it would mean? What do you want of me? Would you suggest that I run away and try the experience of being a factory girl?" She laughed ironically.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea," he replied calmly. "Yes, I think it would be worth while. At least you would have the satisfaction of knowing afterwards that for once in your life you had been a worker — not a drone in the hive."

Aylmer smiled. "You really don't put any value — do you? — on such a little thing as civilization for instance. You, of course, contend that we might better all be on the level — even as savages — than as we are. It counts for nothing to you, that behind me scores of my people — they whose blood flows now in my veins — struggled and ached that they might evolve a higher type, just as some of these poor fac-

tory people are struggling now. What right have you to deny to this blood" — she held out her wrist, touched with delicate finger a blue, throbbing vein — "to deny to it that which it won?"

"What a lie!" But he spoke quietly. "What right to ease, luxury, frivolity, did any stern forebear of yours struggle for? He despised all that, as the noblest in humanity has always despised it. And it is the most terrible travesty upon human endeavour that such as you should have his blood in your veins. Ay, you have his blood, but you have lost his spirit. Elsewhere, it marches on without you." A deep flush spread suddenly over his dark young face — he struck the delicate Sheraton table beside him with avenging hand. "I tell you, it is such as you who are the true dregs of humanity."

Aylmer rose. "Mr. Boothroyd — "

"Sit down!" He spoke with authority. Then his tone softened. "It wasn't fair to talk to you like that — was it? But I want you to see that side — to think about it. You *shall* think about it. Your opportunities are so great. Time and time again, I have looked down upon you in church and thought: 'If the vision might but come to her!'" He hesitated, then added: "Do you think I don't realize? Do you think I don't know the meaning of the way I ask you to take? But think of your husband. Think what it would mean if through you the vision came to him. Some day he will be the head of that business. Youth will have passed. His character will be irrevocably set. Shall it be in the direction of righteousness — or shall it be in the di-

rection of greed, of sordid self-interest, of calculated selfishness? And it is for you to ask yourself — not, how can I reform the existing economic system? — but, shall I have this?" — his hand swept descriptively the beautiful room — "and this" — he touched her silken gown — "shall I weary my body with ease — shall I deck it with the cost of souls — while down there in Pearl Street a woman lies dying with her starved babe at her breast — while over there in Locomotive Street girls go to hell because they cannot live on their wretched weekly wage — the very girls who wait on you in the stores — and must sell what always commands its awful price. While children, too, fresh from the heart of God, are thrown out upon the dung-heap to rot. In the face of facts like these, can you — *dare* you sit at peace, and silence the still small voice in your soul with pat theories about the laws of the distribution of wealth, of ease, of opportunity? Dare you leave the cripple, broken of heart, and of body, behind you in the great race?"

He was silent — it seemed almost as if he had forgotten her. In a moment he added, in a depth of tone that hardly reached her: "My God, no! May I reach the foot of the Cross, with Thy helpless little one in my arms."

The golden sunset streamed into the room through the costly lace hangings, touching with its living sheen the misty greens and greys of a wonderful Corot. An Israels stood out suddenly from a dark corner, revealing its marvellous story of human helplessness and grief — in the alcove a reproduction of the great

Venus from a famous French chisel, posed in magnificent superiority to mere human weal or woe.

And the girl sitting there motionless amid the luxury seemed, in her elegance, her proud grace, an integral, inseparable part of it all. What kin was she to that fag-end of humanity which gasped out its miserable life on Pearl Street, better dead than alive, or went to hell on Locomotive Street — where doubtless it belonged?

Boothroyd stood up. "Do you know 'The Cry of the Age?'" he asked.

Aylmer shook her head.

"Then listen —

"'What shall I do to be just?
What shall I do for the gain
Of the world — for its sadness?
Teach me, O seers that I trust!
Chart me the difficult main
Leading out of my sorrow and sadness
Preach me the purging of pain.

Shall I wrench from my finger the ring
To cast to the tramp at the door?
Shall I tear off each luminous thing
To drop in the palm of the poor?
What shall I do to be just?
Teach me, O Ye in the light,
Whom the poor and the rich alike trust:
My heart is aflame to be right.'"

CHAPTER SEVEN

AS Aylmer came in from her morning walk, a man accosted her at the gate.

"I want work," he remarked.

She stared at him. "Well, can't you get it?"

"No, I can't. I've tried all over, ma'am."

"Have you been to the shops — the Bronsart Shops?"

He made a gesture of despair. "They won't have me. I ain't much good. I'm about wore out. I've been at work fifty years. But I want work."

"Well, come in, and let cook give you a good meal," said Aylmer, desiring to be kind to this unfortunate.

The man looked at her steadily. "I ain't never eat a begged meal yet, lady. I want work."

"But what can I do?" exclaimed Aylmer, helplessly. "You see the work about this place is all provided for." In the distance she saw Hillman, industriously raking the lawn, but keeping distrustful eye upon the intruder — prepared to drive him hence.

"I expect it is, ma'am. But I want work."

The insistent phrase irritated; Aylmer coloured. No doubt he did want work, but was she to be tor-

mented by his need? Yet, after all — Oh, she would write a note to Monteith.

"Just wait," she said graciously. "I will be out again in a moment."

She went into the house and sat down before her writing-table. What had she better say? Would Monteith really give him work?

She laid down her pen. No, he would not. She knew it; she had been seeking a way to escape — that was all. Monteith would toss this bit of human garbage back on the dust-heap — and she? — well, the responsibility for that would be Monteith's.

Would it? What a coward she was!

She went back to the man. "It won't do," she said falteringly, "what I thought of. I really don't know what to do for you." She held her pocket-book obtrusively in her hand. "If you would only let me — it might tide you over, you see. You might find work by the time — this — this — " she fluttered a bill between her fingers.

"Lady, I ain't begging. I want work," repeated the man — calm as before. But it was the calmness of vehement insistence.

"I'm dreadfully afraid you must go away. I'm very sorry. If you'd only take this, you know — "

What had she, a woman, to do with the mighty "want work" question? That was clearly a matter for the men.

The man turned, and went down the walk. His step dragged — his fingers trembled on the latch of the gate.

He looked back; the lady stood still on the steps. She was beautiful, rich, untroubled by care. Why? She had never known cold, hunger, cruel fear of the morrow. Why? When he had never known anything else. He shut the gate behind him, and standing outside, looked back again. The green lawn stretched smooth and restful out of sight — the drift of apple-blossoms whitened the scented wind — great beds of scarlet tulips flamed in front of the fine house within which luxury dwelt and waxed fat. The lady had gone in — had already banished his miseries from her remembrance.

Despair settled cold upon his heart. He was no good. He belonged nowhere. The birds, the trees, the tiniest blade of grass — all had appointed place — only he, hot human flesh and blood, had none.

"Wait a moment."

He turned heavily.

"Oh, come back, I'm sorry." It was Aylmer. She stood beside him, so fair in her white gown — flushed, embarrassed.

"You must come back. It wasn't right. I must *find* work for you."

He followed dumbly. Once inside the gate again, she said to him shyly: "I thought of something. I had to, so quickly. Are you fond of flowers?"

"No, ma'am."

She smiled suddenly — her face was very sweet. It was such a hopeless bit of humanity.

"But you will have to be."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Now, I will tell you. I haven't any work for you. So I must make some. My husband owns a lot on Mary Street — it's in a terrible condition. I go to see a poor sick woman down there who has been in bed for months. And all that she can see from her window is this dirty unkept lot. Would you like to try if we could make it beautiful for her?"

"Yes, ma'am." But there was no enthusiasm in the tone.

Aylmer sighed. Then she remembered that the man was broken-spirited, hungry. What right had she to demand enthusiasm of him? And what reason had he for belief in her — in her intention to do good to him? She opened her pocket-book again, and gave him the bill he had refused. "Go downtown and buy a spade," she said, "and get your dinner. Come back to me at three o'clock — not before — and we will go over to Mary Street together, and see how to begin."

During luncheon she could have laughed aloud at herself. How amused Christian would be if she told him the story!

But at three o'clock John Stroud was waiting for her. He handed her some change. "I got the spade for twenty cents — second-hand," he explained with pride. "It's a good spade."

"That's right," she said appreciatively.

It was indeed a hopeless looking bit of ground — a desolation of refuse heaps. Aylmer's heart failed her. Then she looked towards Mrs. Arkell's little window. Oh, if only this could be turned into a beauty spot for her poor eyes.

She consulted long and earnestly with John Stroud. He seemed not without wisdom as to the disposition of the cast-off clothing and domestic utensils which constituted the sole furniture of the property at present, though at moments, his manner implied a reserve of doubt as to the sanity of the lady who desired to transform such a spot in such a neighbourhood into a flower garden. As Aylmer, however, was a strong sharer of his suspicions their general feeling was one of amity. When they had planned the immediate work, she ran in to see Mrs. Arkell, and somewhat timidly unfolded her idea. "I don't want you to think I'm crazy."

Mrs. Arkell's eyes shone. "A flower garden here — outside my window!"

"Yes, but suppose it's a failure. Suppose nothing grows. I don't know anything about it, and neither does John Stroud."

"Ah, but it won't be." Mrs. Arkell had learnt the necessity of cultivating the optimistic spirit. "Just think of all you'll learn. Tim will help. He doesn't know a thing either."

They laughed gaily.

Some weeks later Christian said suddenly one evening. "So I understand my wife intends to run a horticultural show down on Mary Street."

Aylmer crimsoned. "Oh, Christian, I didn't want you to know anything about that."

"So it appears."

"But you don't mind? The man wanted work."

"Why didn't you come to me about that?"

"Dear, how could that have done any good? You would have given him work just to satisfy me, but in no time he would have been dropped."

"Well? Lots of men are dropped. You don't know anything about it, and it doesn't worry you."

"Yes, but this man came to me. The problem became mine, the moment he did that."

Christian smoked a while in silence. Then he said: "You've had a lot of carting done there. If you had spoken to me I could have got it done much cheaper."

"Of course you could. But I wanted to learn how to do that myself. I am not trying to save either money or myself. Who told you what I was doing?"

"I drove by, and wondered who was trespassing on my property. Your man told me it was my wife."

"It was pretty audacious of me, wasn't it?" Aylmer perched herself on the arm of her husband's chair. "But you can't think what a joy it has been to feel I was really doing something — creating something." She looked wistfully at Christian. "You don't like me to do that?" she asked, conscious of a certain detachment in his manner.

"Oh, I don't know. Do what you like, dear."

Aylmer slipped off the chair. Oh, if he would not be interested — if he would not understand — Well, so be it!

"Have you seen Boothroyd lately?" asked Christian after a long pause.

"No, I think — "

"Well, he's here now," said Vonviette, entering with the rector unannounced. "And you're welcome

to him. I flew in here to escape him, but he followed me. I warn you that he's in an impossible mood."

"Probably that's true," said Boothroyd, as he shook hands. "I'm exhausted," he added looking at Aylmer. "I want help — I want sympathy. I wonder if I may tell you a story — it's a terrible story."

"Must we hear it?" asked Christian.

The complacent sarcasm in the question stung Boothroyd. He flung back his head.

"Yes, I think you must." But he faltered.

"Let me get you something," said Alymer. His exhaustion was evident.

"No, no! If I may only talk to you. You see, soon after I was located here, two country people came to see me about their daughter — a type-writer in this city. They were simple, godly folk who wished me to have an eye to her spiritual welfare. Not that they had any real fears for her — they were too trusting, too unimaginative for that. I hunted the girl up, and found her singularly charming. It seemed as if a lily had sprung from a cabbage-stalk. I inquired about her, and found that she did her work admirably — she was very quick and reliable. I watched her with a good deal of interest and pleasure, because I knew the difficulties and temptations that might assault such a girl. Once, soon after she came she had some trouble from undesirable attentions, but I was told that she acted with dignity. Well, some months ago the head of her department came to see me. He wanted my help. He had discovered — the knowledge rather had been forced upon him, that the girl had become seri-

ously entangled with a young man. It appeared that this condition of things had been going on for nearly two years. She admitted it frankly — indeed she assumed to him an air of bravado — said she had nothing to be ashamed of. He was quite unable to deal with her, and so I went over finally with him to see her. The moment I touched the subject, she flew at me like a tigress — this tender, sweet-hearted girl. She asked me what right I had to interfere in her affairs? I told her that I had the inalienable right of one soul to prevent by any means in its power the destruction of another. Poor little girl! After a while the tears came — she told me everything with such terrible unreserve."

"Vonviette, don't you think it would be well for you to run home now?" There was a biting quality in Christian's voice; his meaning was clear.

"Not at all, my brother," answered the girl briskly. "This story has prospects — it appeals to me. I am not sure that it's at all fit for you, but a reasonable proportion of soot has never disconcerted me."

"Vonviette!" exclaimed Aylmer sharply.

"Oh, my dear, don't!" There was sudden weariness in the girl's manner. "Does anything that I say ever mean anything?"

Boothroyd turned towards Aylmer. "I was saying to you," he continued quietly, "that she told me everything. The child seemed so blinded by her infatuation that she had lost all sense of what to conceal. She said to me repeatedly in such amazement: 'But I'm not bad.'"

Christian took up a book lying at his elbow. "I shan't disturb you if I read?" he asked his wife with an elaborate effect of politeness. He was aware that he was acting like a fool, but he had an indefinite impression that by so acting he might jar Aylmer to a consciousness of the impropriety of her interest in any one belonging to the class into which this girl had fallen. It was intolerable to him that his wife should show this determined disposition to philanthropic dabbling in things forbidden.

"Oh, of course, read if you like, dear," said Aylmer coldly, without looking towards him. Why was he so determined to set his face against any deeper interest in life for her?

"But who was the man?" she asked Boothroyd.

"A fellow connected with one of the banks here in town. He has a fine position — he will rise. We saw him — oh, we have seen him many times. But he has always had the best of us. He said quite coolly that he loved the girl, but that he did not wish to marry her — he saw no reason why he should — that until we came around with our damned interference in his affairs, they were both quite happy. I put it to him that we could undoubtedly secure his dismissal from the bank. He said: 'Oh, yes, and just what good would that do?' Certainly — we could quickly ruin his reputation — his business career — 'and what will you have gained, Mr. Boothroyd? You will make it easier for me to go to the devil all round, that's all. Instead of being a respectable citizen twenty years from now, you will have one more wreck to your credit.' When I

asked him if he had no sense of moral responsibility towards the girl, he said: 'None of the sort that we prided ourselves on — that we were doing more to injure her reputation and his own respect for her than all that he had done ever could.' He continually said: 'She loves me, and has had more happiness in that than she has had before in all her life. Is that worth nothing?'

He insisted that he would probably not love her nearly as much if she were his wife — he considered marriage in nine cases out of ten a most immoral bond."

"What an interesting young man!" exclaimed Vonviette. "I wish I knew some of that sort."

Boothroyd threw her a curious look.

"He said that when he and the girl no longer loved each other, they would part, with respect for themselves and their liberties. And the mere fact that they were free to do that tended, in his humble opinion, to the happy continuance of their relations."

"Horrible!" said Aylmer. "And you have not succeeded in accomplishing anything?"

"No," Boothroyd sighed. "To-night I *know* that we have not. You see, about two months ago I went to the girl and said: 'Now, it has come to this — unless you will go home at once, back to your parents and break this all off, I will go out to them, and tell them exactly what is going on here.' 'I will not go back to them,' she told me. 'I cannot live away from the sight of him. But if you go and tell them I will shoot myself — I will go home to them dead.' I said: 'Yes, I had

taken that into consideration — that I believed she would do as she said, and that I was willing she should shoot herself —'"

A sharp exclamation escaped Aylmer — Vonviette laughed lightly.

"'— that such an ending was preferable in every way to the life she was leading, and would probably mean less — far less of grief to her parents in the long run.'" He appealed to Aylmer: "You know the lines, don't you? —

> "'Yours was not an ill for mending,
> 'Twas best to take it to the grave.
> Oh you had forethought, you could reason,
> And saw your road and where it led,
> And early wise and brave in season — '"

— he paused, and then added:

> "'Oh soon, and better so than later
> After long disgrace and scorn — '"

There was silence for a moment — then Vonviette said lightly: "You have some unusual points of view, Father Boothroyd. You seem to seek escape for the sinner from the consequences of his actions at any cost."

"I do," he answered simply. "To-night I would give all that I have to see that girl freed forever from the terrible consequences that await her. I would prefer to see her return her broken life to the heart of God, because —

"'Thou alone
Keepest judgment for Thine own;
Only unto Thee is known
What to pity, what to blame;
How the fierce temptation came,
What is honour, what is shame.'

You see, this poor child cannot perceive why this is sin. I remember once in wishing to stir her, I asked her whether she had ever considered the harm she was doing to the man she loved in lessening his ideals such as they were — in injuring the faith that every man, however base, has in some woman. That led to a terrible outburst. She could not see how the love which had led her to supreme sacrifice for him, could have such result. So often she has argued with me that the love which asked nothing — which gave just because it was love — was far above that which demanded name, and protection, and legal status."

"But do you think she really believes all she says to you?" asked Aylmer. "Don't you think that in her heart she knows it is — sin?"

"Ah, that is it. You see, He never leaves Himself without a witness. Poor child!" Boothroyd sighed heavily. "Oh, we brought her at last to the point where she agreed to insist with him upon marriage. We nailed it right down until he was to come to her one evening for the express purpose of concluding all arrangements. There is much that I cannot tell you, but he promised us this. Well, that night she waited, and waited. It was so unusual for him not to come, that she grew more and more desperate. At last, near

midnight, she could bear it no more. She went out to his home — it's a beautiful place — and she sat there on the steps until he came. The shock of finding her there seemed to stir something in him — he was overcome — he probably loved her as nearly that night as he will ever love any woman. I asked her how she could have done that — what would have happened if his parents or his sister had seen her there. She said she did not care that night — that she might have told them everything."

"Then she was at last convinced that he ought to marry her?" asked Aylmer.

"Oh, of course. But you see, after that he fell back again. She agreed to go home, and he said he would go out there to see her, and court her in a natural way, and marry her after a while. He argued that it would injure him to accede to any hurry-up proposition — he simply wasn't going to. It was all we could do. She went home and we hoped for the best. But yesterday I met her in town — with him. To-day I have made inquiries — she is in another office. Everything is again as it was two months ago, only now she realizes she is going to hell. I hunted her up to-night."

"What office was she in before?" asked Aylmer.

Boothroyd hesitated — looked at Christian who had sat so silent — then turned back to Aylmer. "In the Bronsart office," he answered.

"What — in our office!" Aylmer leaned over and laid her hand impulsively on her sister-in-law's shoulder. "Oh, Vonviette, think of it — she was there — in our office — and we never knew or cared."

"She knew you, Mrs. Bronsart," said Boothroyd. "You always spoke to her as you passed in. Once when I was fighting with her, she said: 'Don't you ever tell Mrs. Bronsart about me.' You see in the very midst of it she cared for your opinion."

The tears sprang to Aylmer's eyes. "But surely — tell me — you don't mean that it was that little Miss Latimer?"

Boothroyd nodded.

"And to think that you—that you—have known all this, and I have known nothing. Oh, isn't there anything I can do now? Wouldn't she let me see her?"

Christian rose and went over to his wife. "Aylmer, I don't want you to do that kind of thing," he said gently, but very deliberately. "I agree with you that this is a pathetic case. There always have been such — there always will be. You cannot alter the facts of human nature. There is just so much pitch in the world — it's here; you may displace it, but you cannot annihilate it. I do not wish my wife to touch it. I think we can safely leave that to our clergymen."

Boothroyd straightened — a flash of red passed over his dark young face.

"I will consult with Warley" — Christian looked towards Boothroyd — "of course he is the head of the department to whom you referred — he is an excellent man" — the tone of patronage was doubtless unconscious — "and we will see what can be done. Perhaps I can bring some pressure to bear on the young man in question. You would not object, perhaps, to letting me know who he is?"

Boothroyd's eyes flashed. "Your sister will," he answered without looking at Vonviette. "She spent last Sunday afternoon driving with him."

Vonviette laughed. "You mean Mr. Kent, do you?" Her colour rose. "Ah, that puts such a different face on the matter. No, he will never marry your young person. And to tell you the truth as I perceive it, I should think it a pity if he did — for him, I mean." A passionate desire tormented her to leave nothing wilful unsaid to this man of irritating ideals.

Boothroyd looked down at her — little, elegant trifle of humanity that she was, and ached to shake her soul loose from her frills.

And Aylmer watched them — she never forgot the impressions they left upon her just then — the young cleric, his tall slight figure drawn tense, his dark head with its curious brilliance of lighting in the eyes; his face so austere in judgment of the girl before him — and she, dainty as a French pastel; her face a child's for colour and innocence of curve, but with those cool blue eyes which had seen much and mocked at most things — yet a girl delicate still of mind, though of lip a cynic — without understanding why; a girl trailed for years over the continent at the heels of a mother whose frivolity was a byword — a girl who had seen much of the worst of some notably evil men and women, and thus had come, pathetically soon, to distrust — or so she supposed — all others. Even now, her soft lip curled. The boy before her — what knew he, with his piously guarded emotions, of that fury in the blood, which drove men and women

to hell? He thought the case of this girl tragic — exceptional. Bah! the disease from which she suffered was commonplace in its frequency.

So she looked at him, and her blue eyes mocked.

"You take things seriously, Father Boothroyd. Well, I appreciate that. You get so much more out of life that way. The girl you have been speaking of does the same thing. Suppose some man had fallen in love with her, as they call it, and she had married him in the usual very uninteresting way, and settled down to keep house in decency and humdrum morality. In a short time her mind would not have risen above such problems as the innate toughness of cheap steak, and the size of the weekly wash. Why, if you please — tell me, I honestly want to know — is that better for a woman's soul than knowing that she has experienced to the limit every emotion of which she was capable — that she has suffered all she could suffer — that the maddest joys have been hers — the heights of hope, the depths of despair? Why, because she has used all of herself that there is to use, should you get after her with your beggarly little foot-rule, and say: 'Oh, but you mustn't measure more than this, this way, or that, that way? It's not legal.' Don't you know that all the women in history whose lives we care a fig about and whose pictures we love to look at in the galleries, have been just like this girl? But we're all so afraid — and yet it's so deathly stupid having to pretend that all we've got is the emotions of angels — there's so little in it — but it's only fear of the opinion of all the other angels that keeps us what you call good. But I say,

Father Boothroyd" — she snapped her fingers daintily — "let the girl go to the devil — she'll have lived at least."

No one spoke until Christian, rising, said with chill politeness, "I shall be glad to see you home, Vonviette."

Boothroyd left the house with them. But at the door Aylmer said to him: "Yes, but you don't believe that? — you don't think that that poor child should take her own life?"

His eyes burnt upon her. "Should I be holding my pulpit if I did? And yet, perhaps, for her — Oh, unless some woman who has loved and who understands the terrible complexity of love — " he left her, with his unvoiced question tearing her heart.

And in the days which followed she grew afraid of herself. For there came to her again and again, a question often denied, often evaded — what right had Christian to assign her judgment second place? — what right had he to proscribe, to dictate, to expect of her entire subordination to his interests, to his opinions, to his prejudices? Did the right inhere in the simple fact that he was a man, and she a woman? It seemed so; there were times when her blood burned hot over that answer.

It came to her suddenly one day with an acute sense of shock that she was no longer a wife just happy in the discovery of her power to please, to charm, to allure the heart of man. She had been content for a long time to bask radiant in the sun of her young god's smiles. But he was not a god — he was

mere flesh and blood like herself. And did flesh and blood under the microscope reveal why one should enforce, the other submit?

She thought of the women she knew — all more or less subject to a master. Why? — because of their lack of experience, of business knowledge, as so often argued by men? No, for except in some few striking instances men sought eagerly the advice of their wives upon the most serious questions, frankly conceding technical inexperience to be no bar to admirable judgment. It seemed that it was only when it came to matters which concerned herself that the man assumed the rôle of master. Then he put his foot down — president and pauper alike.

Clearly, the attitude was a left-over from savagery. From the beginning woman had been physically handicapped — in bondage to the perpetuation of the species, while man had had ever his personal bodily freedom. He might be conscious at times of her mental equality with him — he was always conscious of her physical limitation, and of the immense advantage which this gave him.

At bottom then — so she reasoned — it became simply a question of which was the better equipped from the brute point of view. The one that was, had dominated. It was surely not a noble basis upon which to erect a claim to superiority, and as she analysed deeper and deeper, she felt that man's every act of courtesy to woman was a subtle form of apology to her.

But why must she torment herself with these ques-

tions — why dissect the causes of her husband's tenderness with so unsparing a scalpel? Why could she not accept her life as myriads of women did — have happiness bought for her with trinket and toy? Ah, that would never be! The inheritance of stern struggling blood was indeed hers, in spite of all that Amyx Boothroyd had said, and it was to urge her, whither she as yet knew not.

It had sent her down the street with John Stroud and his second-hand spade; it called upon her now to save a girl's broken life from destruction. But what to do — what to do? For she perceived clearly that Christian's attitude was apt to become uncompromising in regard to some matters about which she already feared the development of her own convictions.

Yet a few days later she felt herself driven to speak to him. "Christian, I want to do something for that girl." Her tone pleaded.

He looked at her in silence.

"Please, dear."

Why should she entreat? Why was she not free, as he, to do as duty bade her? Questions like these scorched in her heart even as she smiled at him wistfully.

"Dear Aylmer," he said gently, "I don't want my wife concerned in that kind of thing. There is so much evil that you know nothing of. I don't want you to. I come in contact with it every day almost. You can't think what it means to me to come home and look in your sweet eyes and forget some of the terrible things

men must know, but women should not. Some women have to, of course. They are forced to know. But you need not."

Christian felt himself badly placed. In reality he had no serious objection to his wife's interesting herself in reason in the troubles of unfortunate humanity. But he had learnt to fear the force of her temperament. The complexity and strength of character which made her a woman of powerful fascination to the man who loved her, might, he felt, drive her towards experiments of which a weaker woman would be wisely afraid. There was a thoroughness about her which appalled him; she was incapable of the ladylike dilettante interest in vital matters with which most women appeased their consciences. Unknown to her, he was watching with passionate interest the progress of her garden on Mary Street. Figuratively and literally she had ploughed her way through difficulties which to her ignorance, doubled by that of the man she had there, must have seemed at times quite insuperable. Yet she had pursued her intention undauntedly — he felt how tender he could have been to her if it had only failed! — the two-hundred-foot lot already gave promise of abundant bloom, and was clearly the pride of the neighbourhood. He had expected to see it carried away piecemeal, but when he had once suggested that to Aylmer, she answered composedly: "Oh, no! There are men around there who would almost lynch anybody who destroyed our garden. It is safer than high walls could ever make it. You see, they know I am not doing that for myself."

It was out of the question — how could he in justice to herself, allow her the unbridled liberty she craved? Her temperament was as matches in the hands of a child — it was his duty to protect her from herself. It was an excellent argument — with his own temperament left out of it. For he had not yet the least perception of his vehement underlying determination to conquer his wife if she showed persistence in opposing her will to his. He neglected to remember that he was man.

Therefore he said to her as she sat silent after his last remark: "Dear, you have your garden. Be content with that. It gives you enough to struggle with. You've done well on that."

"Yet, you know" — she laid his hand against her cheek — "you know if I had asked you if I might do that you would have said, 'No.'"

He could not deny it.

But why — why, must she want to be more than just his wife? Why, she was made for that. She had in alluring combination some of the qualities of the coquette which all men love, and those deeper, tenderer traits in which every man, at some great moment in his life, invests all the faith he has. Some men there are who grow from youth to manhood pillowed against that trust — this man had never dreamed of the richness of such experience until it opened to him, deep within his wife's heart. No one knew as he did, the subtle sweetness of her nature — it was sacred to him alone. And looking at her now, he feared with

all his fierce young energy, the broadening of her interests. Himself — it was enough

And for the first time, consciously, the man in him rose hot, to master the errant impulses of this woman beloved, to whom Love must — should — be all.

CHAPTER EIGHT

IT was proof of the strength of will that Christian feared in his wife, that as the days passed she said nothing further to him in regard to the question at issue between them.

They were in the midst of particularly brilliant social festivities consequent upon the marriage of a widely popular couple of their acquaintance, and Christian observed with relief that Aylmer appeared to be engrossed in the duties which fell to her as the wife of the most prominent young man in Weston. And it was with particular chagrin that he hurried to her one evening as she was finishing dressing and said;

"Dear, it's too bad. I can't go with you to-night. I've just had a wire, and must catch the 9:25 East. But you will go, won't you? My darling, you are beautiful." He stood away, and looked at her for a moment with eyes that glowed. "Aylmer, my wife," he whispered, drawing her near to him, "I wonder if you know how much I love you!"

She smiled at him. "Dear, I know," she said simply.

Yet, when he was gone, her eyes were wet. Why, why, if he loved her — ?

Presently her father came in; she rushed upon him with an enthusiasm that almost dismayed him. "Oh, dad dear, it's so good to see you! Why, I haven't seen you for a week, a whole long week."

Steadily, as time distanced her girlhood from her, she realized with ever clearer comprehension, how rich her young life had been in its nearness to great emotions, to noble impulses, and to lofty simplicity.

"You're going to prayer-meeting, dad, aren't you? I'll go with you. I won't go to the Dunhams'." She explained her husband's departure. Prayer-meeting! But a little while ago how she would have laughed at the bare idea of that for her — now. But to-night she felt suddenly hungered for she knew not what.

"I'm so tired of it all, dad — of the clothes I wear, the food I eat, the people I smile at, the things I think — oh, I'm so tired of my own mind. Yes, to-night I'll go with you."

"With me?" He looked radiant; then doubtful. "But not like that, my child."

"Like this!" She had forgotten — she looked down at herself — at her bare arms and her white neck around which pearls were strung — at her gown filmy with lace — at the fan set with diamonds dangling from the long chain at her waist. That she unclasped and threw aside.

"Oh, it's a chilly night, even if it is June. I'll throw a long cloak over me, dad dear. I shall look like a nun — your saints shall not be grieved by my gorgeousness."

"But wait a moment," she said when she was at

last ready. "I'm nervous to-night." She went into the dining-room — he followed her without thinking — and poured out a glass of wine from a decanter on the sideboard.

"Oh, my child!" The exclamation seemed forced from him. Suddenly everything — the beauty, the lavishness of highly wrought detail in the stately room — the emphasis of luxury over all — the sparkle of the wine — hurt his old eyes strangely.

Aylmer set down the empty glass and turned to her father. "Oh, but dad — " she paused, for there smote in upon her anew a sense of that gulf which yawned now between the old days and these. A glass of wine — her precious father — he questioned the ethics of that!

Forsythe remained silent. For he was remembering with curious humility, which was, however, but a variation of pride, that his daughter was Mrs. Bronsart — that his ways were no longer hers. It was undeniable that there had been no evidence yet of that influence upon her husband which he had confidently expected of her, and for which he continued in prayer, but influences were subtle forces, judged offhand. To a servant in faith the Lord *must* ultimately grant the desire of the heart.

The church known as the Central Presbyterian was a big, old-fashioned edifice built in the early days to accommodate a large and devout congregation, to whom any intimation of architectural beauty would have savoured of the wiles of the scarlet woman. Now, however, as a sop to the frivolity of a young and irre-

ligious generation an ambitious board of trustees had superintended the decoration of the "audience-room" with such overwhelming ignorance of the ecclesiastical fitness of things that it presented the gaudy attractiveness of a dance-hall. Any old-time tendency towards reverence in the house of God was rendered difficult to the occupants of opera chairs, facing a platform of which the furnishings were upholstered in a lively tint of sky blue. The services were advertised as being "bright and cheerful;" it seemed only a question of time when, if the trustees succeeded in their plans for the entertainment of humanity, they would be described as "blithe and mirth-provoking."

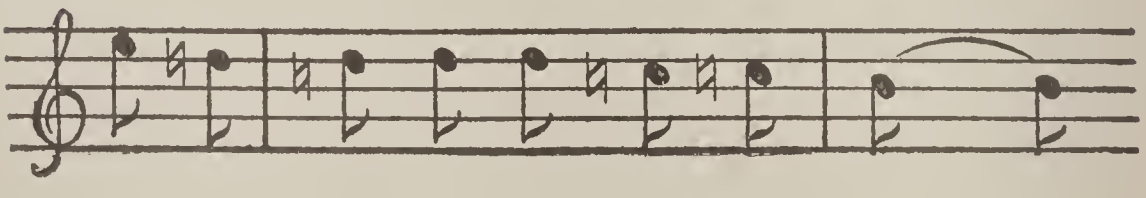
But below stairs, in the room where the superintendent of the Sunday-school held his weekly round-up of the young lambs of the flock, and where at the mid-week meeting what remnant there was of pious and respectable sheep gathered for prayer and praise, the ancient order of mustiness still prevailed.

As Aylmer stepped into the basement with her father, the damp air, heavy with the sighs of dead and gone saints enveloped her like a fog, and set her back into that lost childhood in which this peculiar odour as of decaying piety, had always been associated with her conceptions of God and morality, as also with a number of distinctly disagreeable people whose conscious perfection was a standing rebuke to a perishing world. She had often wondered why God did not choose more attractive individuals for His saints.

She was conscious now of the little flutter which passed over the meeting as she walked in — indeed, the sweep of her silken skirts struck her as unpleasantly obtrusive, and the way to the front seat, which her father always occupied, as very long. She subsided as quietly as might be, and while her father bent his white head in prayer, she studied the drab walls, insistently splashed with blue and crimson texts. After all, what hypnotic power of suggestion there was in those inescapable verses, ever before the eye: "God so loved the world — " she read that again and again — "Lovest thou Me?" — "Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Marvellous power was entrusted to these trembling saints. She looked about at them with sudden interest, as she might upon the inhabitants of another world. All this was what they believed? Did they? Did her father, dear saint of God that he was?

And then, sharp across her reflections, there glinted the gay tantalizing melody of the Habanera song as she had heard it from the throat of a famous Carmen a few nights before.



The blood in her veins quickened. Bah! What knew these pallid souls of the scarlet and flame of human life. To them its tones were all drab — the vital spark at the root of them smothered beneath the grey ash of burnt-out convictions for which once, in the brave long ago, their religious forebears had laid down their lives and counted it "all joy," but which now, they knew in their hearts there was no longer any excuse for cherishing save that of cowardice.

She sat straight, and drew her cloak close about her. It was well, indeed, for her to realize that this church of her childhood had become an alien spot to her.

Ah, but her father! She looked at him intently. How well the simplicity of his faith became him! She could not imagine him other than as he was — she would not wish him other.

The pastor came in — a man of innocence and sincerity. He set forth before his people twice a Sunday an antiquated theology of the horrors of which he had not the least conception — the words "damnation" and "everlasting death" were constantly upon his benevolent old lips — had he stepped carelessly upon a worm he would have felt the stain of murder upon his soul. Each Sabbath it was borne in anew upon the minds of the trustees that he was a piece of furniture distinctly out of keeping with the style of pulpit decoration demanded by an enlightened modern taste, but he had a curious hold upon a large proportion of the congregation, and they had not yet seen their way clear to relegate him to the lumber-room where he belonged.

The meeting began with the singing of a group of evangelistic hymns, and Aylmer listened, at first critical, then stirred to a consciousness of a spirit at work upon the dry bones. But what tricks upon themselves these godly people were capable of playing! They understood how to manipulate their emotions as effectively as the Roman Catholic whom they despised.

Her father's voice in prayer! — she bent her head, a thrill in every nerve, but she hardened herself again to the rôle of critic. What a voice it was! — what depths of tenderness, of pathos, of entreaty it held. It would have been worth a fortune to him on the stage. What a great part religion had played in his life. Yes, he was what the scholar would sneer at as an uncultured man — could the scholar have equalled the dignity and beauty of language as natural to him in prayer as breath to the other? For to him behind the veil there was ever the vision of the Eternal — he had learned a majesty of utterance taught in no school of oratory whereby to approach the Presence. And to-night his heart was all a-quiver, for was not his child beside him, there before the throne of grace — his child, crown of his life, in whom he yearned to see manifest the fruits of the Spirit?

A responsive reading was in progress when the side door opened, and the rector of the Church of the Ascension came in, and took the seat evidently prepared for him beside the pastor.

Again, that little breath of astonishment pulsed through the audience. Verily, this was a night of dramatic effects for them.

And in her seat, Aylmer felt rather than saw the swift look in the young man's eyes when he discovered her there.

"Out on the ocean all boundless we ride,
We're homeward bound, homeward bound."

Her father's voice, a tenor, clear and carrying even now in its aging tones, rose sweetly strong beside her. He sang with unconscious abandon — the spirit of the hymn had him in thrall.

"Steady, O pilot! stand firm at the wheel,
Steady! we soon shall outweather the gale."

How rapt his face! — how real to him this picture of the transient voyage of life!

"Into the harbour of heaven now we glide,
We're home at last;
Softly we drift on its bright silver tide,
We're home at last.
Glory to God! all our dangers are o'er
We stand secure on the glorified shore."

How passionate his faith in the life immortal! — he dwelt serene beneath the mighty promise of it, strong to endure the tempest and the wreck with the lights of that eternal harbour ever before his eyes.

How *could* he believe as he did ? How easy to say to him that from the great waste of waters of eternity no messenger had ever returned bearing branch of hope. Why, of course, his faith, militant as it seemed, could

be destroyed, if one went deliberately to work to do it. His strong sense would not find it possible to reject the evidence against some of his most cherished beliefs if he were once made to face it. But what would be gained by such destruction? What would it profit him to have it proved that the lights he discerned so joyously across the tempest-driven sea of life were but beams from his own too eager imagination?

But truth — was it not better at any price than delusion, deceit? Yes, if one could be sure of getting it in place of delusion. But who did? Had the Bronsarts clearer insight into the deep things of life than this dear, believing father beside her?

She debated this point while one brother after another led in prayer. Was it not likely that her father had *more* of truth and *less* of illusion than many who believed themselves possessed of the gift of all mysteries and all knowledge? — who would have derided his antiquated faiths as evidence of inferior mental endowment?

Ah, but that was because of his nature and that type of character which sought naturally the things of the spirit. As an avowed agnostic the mystical and ethical would still have dominated all other qualities in him. On the other hand, Christie Bronsart as a revivalistic Methodist would probably have believed — absolutely believed — no more than he did now, and his ethics might have been on an even lower plane — he would have been so quick to see the advantage such large profession of piety afforded him for extra shady operations.

Aylmer sighed. These were difficult questions.

The prayers ended, and the old pastor arose. "Dear brethren and sisters: Our brother of the neighbouring church has kindly consented to speak to us to-night. I myself am learning much from him, and would that you, too, might listen to some of the truths I think he has to teach. And let us, whether we can agree with him or not, give kindly heed to him to-night."

The meeting was electrically still as the young rector of the Ascension Church stepped forward. His tall figure outlined itself delicately slim against the grey background; his dark head with its alert poise, his brilliant eyes strangely tenacious in grasp of the people before him; the nervous, eager lips of the born speaker — all this, allied with his naïve youthfulness of aspect made instant, fascinating appeal for him.

For a moment he looked at them. Then he bent his head. "O Christ — we are here, Thy children, called by Thy name. Are we worthy? Thou knowest. Day after day, Thou dost meet us, each one, in the way, and say unto us: Whither goest thou? And do we answer: With thee, O Christ, to the Cross, if need be?

"O God, help us, that we may at all times and everywhere give our strength to the weak, our substance to the poor, our sympathy to the suffering, and our hearts to Thee."

And then he began the direct appeal to the consciences of his hearers which was to leave ineradicable stamp upon the souls of some that heard, and hearing, understood.

"Down there, by the polluted river, there is dying

to-night a little child — its life choked out of it by foul air, foul food. I have been sitting beside it until I came here. God sent that tiny soul into the world upon some mission. To-night, we are sending it back to Him, His order cancelled.

"Down there, in the festering alleys along the river front, there are children playing to-night. That is, we suppose them to be playing. In reality they are attending a night-school for the propagation of crime —we furnish the school for them, because as a playground we furnish them only the festering alley.

"To-night in this town of which we are so proud, there are girls going to destruction because they serve us through the day in department stores at half a living wage. As the mother of one of them said to me yesterday: 'Didn't the manager tell my girl there wasn't any call for a wise young woman to starve?'

"As good men and women of business we are proud of ourselves, my friends, when we buy cheap. Is it not about time that we began to ask ourselves *what it is* that we are buying cheap?"

How still and insistently penetrating the young voice was — how calm the manner. Yet in that very calmness there inhered an intensity of dramatic force that held the people before Boothroyd breathless. Instance after instance he gave, unrelenting, of the horrors of that life in which his hearers had unconsciously so often thanked God they had no part.

But at last, for a painfully still moment, he paused. His eyes had not once met Aylmer's. They did not now; his voice but sank lower as he spoke again. "For

months I have watched a young girl going to pieces on the cruelest rocks of human experience. And I have found no woman to help her. It demands the noblest sort, friends, to reach down into the blackest pit. Yet one there was, I think, who might have saved that soul."

Aylmer threw back her cloak, unconscious of the bare neck and arms thus revealed to the startled people about her. She felt herself choking, stifled by her indignation. For how dare — how *dare* he? She sat high in her seat, drawn tense, a brilliant figure in that drab assemblage. Many eyes rested upon her, fascinated, disapproving, envious. Yet some were tender, for there were about her men and women sweet of soul, who looked upon her, and longed that her heart, so restless under its weight of gems, might find peace in "believing." But Aylmer had forgotten the people about her — she was unconscious of everything save that tall slight figure which stood there, accusatory — in the hot silence of her heart she flung back answer after answer to him as he proceeded with his address.

Her father watched her, suddenly afraid — he knew not of what. He drew nearer to her — laid his hand timidly upon hers. But this was not the soft hand of his little girl — the fingers were sharp with jewels. With a swift movement Aylmer lifted his hand to her lips — she felt inalienably near to her father in that moment, and something passionately in tumult within her demanded outlet.

The round, white-faced old clock ticked near to closing time. Boothroyd paused — then made last

effort to draw these people to him. "My friends, all this is not new to you. It is literally dinned into your ears from day to day. Philanthropy has become the pose of our time — I am tempted to say, the crime. It is organized to distraction, and it has afforded an excellent opportunity to a number of self-seeking individuals to become prominent and to deceive others into believing them pure in heart. The cult of philanthropy has achieved proud place in the press — it colours politics — the society woman seeks in it fresh sensation — the man who corners the market and sees his ruined brother a suicide receives the gilded title of philanthropist in exchange for a cheque which represents the price of a life gone down in despair and dishonour.

"Do not misunderstand me. I do not disbelieve in organized effort. Far from it. But far, far above it, I place individual effort. You subscribe, perhaps, to this or that charity. But there is nothing redemptive in a dollar. It must be outstretched to save in a warm, human hand. The soul in the mire is never drawn out by this society or that. But what are you to do? Listen! —" he lifted his hand — the town clock slowly struck nine — neither man nor woman stirred in the still room — "down there on the river front that little child by now has gone back to God, bearing terrible indictment against us — not against society — against *you*, against *me*.

"The boys are still there, gathered about their leaders, in those loathsome alleys. Some of them have learnt lessons they knew nought of one hour ago —

lessons full of peril to you and to me. And I say, Thank God for that!" — he struck the table before him sharply — "for it seems as if nothing but peril to our precious selves and our children will arouse us to a sense of what is due to these poor outcast ones. The girls?" — he paused again — his eyes swept in glance of fire the faces before him — he looked high — "O God, have mercy upon them — we have none.

My friends, there is in this city just one religious organization which carries its gospel with it whereever it goes. We don't think much of it. We smile at its crude music, its dense ignorance, its tawdry affectation of officialism. But suppose some night you try the experiment of following in its train. Borrow a uniform if you can — brother, if your heart is right, you will receive a wonderful baptism of the Spirit when you put it on — and go out with them — sing their strident hymns — kneel down in the dust of the street when they pray — for once help them to hold high the banner of their crucified Christ, symbol of that mighty love which would draw all men unto it. And then, perhaps there, while the noisy drum beats, and the song rises shrill in your ear, there will come to you the glory of the inner vision, the message of the still, small voice of your soul."

He waited; then with hands outspread in benediction: "Arise, let us go hence."

The meeting was over.

CHAPTER NINE

"WHY, many's the time when I was a young growing lad," said Christie Bronsart, "that I've taken a quarter out of my pocket and looked and looked at it, and longed to spend it for something to eat — I was so hungry."

"And yet — you wouldn't!" exclaimed Aylmer. "Why?"

They were sitting on the lawn behind the house, in the sunshine of a golden afternoon. The dense shade of giant elms sheltered them from the glare; the deep green of velvety grass was rest to the eye. In the distance, against the high wall there was a riot of old-fashioned flower and shrub — tall pink hollyhocks banked against lilacs past their blooming — masses of white phlox looked down upon by yellow sunflowers — here the purple beauty of a pansy bed — there the tall spires (piercing the blue,) of a group of spruces with their air of austere remoteness from the rabble of green things beneath them.

"Why" repeated Christie Bronsart. "Ah!" he paused, his eyes seeking that far-fled past. "My child, it seems to me now that I never did eat unless I just had to. I couldn't afford that kind of luxury." "And if

I had" — he looked back over his shoulder at the stately house behind them — "well, you and the boy would not have been here, perhaps."

Aylmer's eyes warmed. A hungry boy and the quarter in his hand! It was heroism of a determined type.

And the shrewd man watching her, divined her feeling and felt repaid for that little break into the difficult personal history to which he so seldom referred.

"I remember so well — Oh, it seems but yesterday — the noon time that I came home and found my mother in tears. I just stood and looked at her — I had never realized before that my mother could weep. She never had — no matter what had happened to us. She had always been so strong to meet the battle. Well, I came in a boy, but I went back to my work a man. It was my father, of course — it always was my father. We could never get ahead because of him. But that day I went back to the screw factory fiercely determined to conquer. It was the great beginning. In two years, I, a boy, was foreman. In ten years I owned that screw factory. And I don't believe I ever once had *all* I wanted to eat until I did. But my mother"— his light, easy voice shook suddenly — "I would give ten years of my life now if she might but have known one of freedom from the grind, the bitterness of such poverty as was ours."

"Ah, but she must have known, she understood that you were going to conquer!" cried Aylmer. Her eyes were aglow.

"Yes, she just saw that and died," said Bronsart.

"Oh, for her it was enough. I don't believe that a mother like that would ever have cared for ease and luxury. She would have despised all that."

"Maybe." He was silent a while; then he added: "When my little girl came, I called her after my old mother — she had been a Von Viet — but Vonviette isn't Von Viet, is it?"

"No, of course not." Aylmer flashed a look at him.

"There's just all the difference between Vonviette and my mother, that there is between Von Viet and Vonviette."

"Perhaps. Still, one can't be sure. Some day you may suddenly be astonished to find a great deal more of her grandmother in Vonviette than you could believe now."

"Maybe. But she doesn't look much like it at this moment," said Bronsart.

Aylmer followed his glance, and there was Vonviette trailing over the grass in the elegance of a white lace gown.

"Iced tea? Yes, please, Aylmer. Freezing! I'm so warm. I'm seething."

"But it's not such a hot day," said Aylmer smiling.

"No. It's just myself. Oh!"

She threw her hat, then her gloves, on the grass. The wind shook the roses — a drift of petals fell at her dainty feet as though the green carpet beneath were not soft enough to cushion them.

"What's up, Von?" inquired Christian lazily. He had been a silent listener to his wife and father; it had

occurred to him that his keen-eyed parent understood far more than he had supposed of the difficulties which were gathering about him, and had desired to do him a diplomatic turn. It was, perhaps, well for Aylmer to hear it emphasized that the house of Bronsart had been founded in hardship and self-denial.

"What's up? Just this. There was a man at the Clearys' this afternoon. I was sweet to him — perfectly sweet — Oh, I will not disguise that fact from you, sonny — " she threw a rosebud at her father — "you see, I was busy making somebody else desperate — and that man, right there, with people in the garden close to us — that man asked me if — if — and do you know what I said to him? I just looked at him and said: "Go to the devil, Mr. Kent, It's with him you belong."

Christian sat up. "Kent!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Kent." Even now the girl was choked with the rage of remembrance.

Christie Bronsart whistled. "Kent — what's Kent done that he should be talked to like a felon?"

"Things not fit for your young ears, sonny."

"Oh, you women are hard to please," said her father indulgently.

"Ah, if we were only hard enough!" The girl settled into haughty silence.

"But Vonviette," said Aylmer when they found themselves alone for a moment.—"When Mr. Boothroyd talked to us the other night, dear, I thought you — didn't care."

"You thought that?" Vonviette bit her lip; her blue eyes flashed tears. But she said nothing further.

The summer passed; Aylmer and her husband went to the seashore with the rest of their kind. They had debated going abroad, but Christie Bronsart gave sign for the first time, of leaning upon his son; there were disturbing reports as to a possible strike among the men, and he wished to have Christian within easy reaching distance.

Christian had been eager to get away; he persuaded himself that a change of scene and interest would rid Aylmer of an outlook upon life which threatened to become morbid.

But at the end of two months he felt that he knew much less of his wife than he had before. She had plunged with Vonviette into the thickest of the social fray, displaying to his astonished eyes qualities full-grown of which he had never suspected least germ in her. Day after day he nursed grievance in his heart; she neglected him — it became evident that other men discovered coercing charm in her.

At last the knowledge pierced him sharp — the pangs of jealousy possessed him — him, Christian, her husband!

There had been a dance at one of the cottages, and during the endless evening, while he was forced into sullen attentions towards women whom he found hopelessly uninteresting, he caught constant glimpse of her, and always with her, or near to her, the man whom he felt himself growing to hate. Yet, when she was out of sight, his torment was even less bearable.

But when, long after midnight, he found himself at last alone with Aylmer in the silence of their own rooms, the beating of his heart almost forbade speech. She stood in front of a pier-glass, idly looking at herself, as she pulled a white lace scarf ruthlessly through her fingers. It occurred to him that she was remembering something — something that fool Inderrieden had said to her perhaps. It was not to be borne.

"Aylmer, do you think it — well — to show quite as much — favour — as you certainly do — to — to Inderrieden?"

Bah! His hands were trembling like any woman's.

She turned and looked at him, unhurriedly — it smote him afresh that she was an Aylmer new to him.

She was wearing a little mousseline gown, pink with rose leaves — girlishly simple. A wide pink sash defined her slender waist, and fell to the hem amid a dainty confusion of frills. Her neck, and it was very beautiful, was bare.

He had loved the soul of this girl — or had thought so — had cossetted himself soft upon the belief that while all men might behold and see that she was fair, he alone might appraise her hidden pricelessness of heart. But now, as he looked at her, the thought stabbed him that a man might sell his soul for the fairness of her, with no heed or demand for aught in her save that.

"Aylmer!" It was a cry, breaking from him unbidden.

"No, perhaps it is not wise. But it seems to be inevitable."

"Inevitable!"

"Why, yes. One must amuse one's self."

"Aylmer!"

"Let me explain, dear." She looked very calm, very wise. "I have wanted in all these weeks to find out just how a woman in my station in life is supposed to pass her time. You see, she must have no serious interests — at least, I must not. So I have been experimenting. I have tried to do as nearly as possible just what I saw other women do. And you were pleased — proud — when you saw that I was going to be a success here."

He knew that.

"But did it never occur to you, dear, that there is always a reverse side? There is Mrs. Van Wyck — a woman of great charm — and tact. Did you never think what an amount of energy she spends in preventing the general public from seeing the reverse side of the shield she carries so gracefully. Mr. Van Wyck has probably taken a good many looks at it. You see there is young Marley."

"You mean, then —" Christian hesitated — "Aylmer, is it possible that you — you imply that there is always some man?"

"Did you think, dear, that these women you admire are filled to the brims of their souls with happiness by being irreproachable hostesses, and all that sort of empty time-killing? Shall a woman be forced to exhaust every art to make of herself a thing of beauty, and then be expected to content herself with smiling sweetly into space like a stuffed doll?"

Christian began to speak — she stopped him.

"Wait! I want to say all. Then you may judge. I didn't plan what I have done. It grew upon me. I had to see once for all, whether happiness would be possible to me — this way." She threw her husband a strange look. "Perhaps it would, Christian," But suddenly, she was breathless — she was remembering.

"But I — Aylmer — you forget — as your husband — "

She smiled swiftly — he felt the desperation of impotence before the consciousness, at last fully awake in her, of the vast power of the woman over the man who loves her.

"As my husband," she repeated. She bent towards him, and knew herself tormenting — she had learnt much of late. "But dear — you forget — a husband is nothing."

He looked at her.

"That seems to shock you. But why? You see it here, for yourself. I want you to see it. And there is something else I want you to realize."

In a moment she was in a flame. "Marriage is not to women what men like to pretend they think it is. It is not all-inclusive, all-satisfying. A woman of fine energies, of large nature, was never meant to sit within the domestic pen, awaiting patiently her lord's return from that world of interest, of endeavour in which she may have no part. Oh, Christian — " she studied him a moment; then added slowly: "Oh, how I wish I knew you well enough just to tell you, dear, some of the things a woman thinks about a

man, and never, never tells him. I wonder," her voice was very wistful — "if you'd love me any more."

Love her? He looked at her, his heart hot with pain. It was bitter to him that she had never seemed more full of charm than in this moment of revolt.

"But you — " he said roughly — "you don't care whether I love you or not. A husband's nothing."

"Ah, isn't he — isn't he?" she breathed.

She slipped from her seat and knelt beside him, lifting her sweet lips to his, forgetting now all that she had learnt of the value of her charm, of its endangering power — remembering only that this was her husband — the man whom she loved.

He caught her to him —crushed her lips against his — bruised the perfume from the roses at her breast. Ah, it was a moment possible only to the husband, of which the lover may make to himself but dream.

But the silence was broken at last. Aylmer drew away from her husband — suddenly, adorably shy.

"What a stupid, unoriginal way of loving women men have," she said lightly.

"I daresay," he answered, "but it satisfies us. And that is why we make love to women at all, I suppose. It is primarily not for the sake of satisfying them."

"No. And you demand so much from us, and take so little for granted. Because I make a few experiments — "

His face clouded. "M·· darling — Inderrieden," he said abruptly.

She fell silent, remembering. There were some

things she would have liked to tell him, but she must not, and it vexed her soul that she dared not be frank with him.

"Yet some of these women are so clever," she said, following out her line of thought — "much cleverer than their husbands, who are managing immense concerns. But they have never been permitted to have any interests outside of themselves. Their husbands and fathers have been just like you, dear."

"But, Aylmer, you are such a dangerous extremist. You know that."

"I daresay. "She spoke absently; she was thinking of the shock that the discovery of some things in her own nature had lately been to her. She had faced them squarely, from the instant that she had first begun to suspect herself. Perhaps if she had never met a man calculated to play the subtlest of all games with such delicacy of skill, such swift appreciation, she might have remained ignorant of the possibilities lurking within her. Yet she owned to herself with absolute candour that the complexity she had discovered in herself was not unpleasing to her.

After all, what constituted morality? That she could ask herself such a question was, at first, a supreme shock to her. Yet she ended by arguing that question long, at times in great bewilderment. Was she not driven to the conclusion that virtue was but rarely matter of choice? — people were good because the accident of conditions assisted them to be so — the fancies of a woman with six children and all the housework to do with one pair of hands, did not

lightly turn to thoughts of love, and in a census of the moral and the immoral she would be most undeservingly, perhaps, enrolled among the righteous. There were men, pillars most rigidly upright of domestic architecture, who devoutly thanked God that they were not as their profligate neighbours, all unconscious that their vaunted morality was merely the result of a fortuitous lack of temptation.

Love? — the love that sent her to her husband's lips — Ah, it was a treacherous emotion, but the dignifying, the ennobling of it had glorified humanity. The vows of poverty, of chastity, assumed by men and women in all ages under many forms — what smothered cry of the heart was there, what terror of the mighty forces of greed and passion? Yet the man on this side, the woman on that, surveyed their small souls complacently, and said: Behold me, and the morality that is mine!

Aylmer looked tenderly at her husband — how little he knew of the nature within her which demanded — which must have large place for its breathing.

Love him? — of course she loved him. But there were many great things in life beside the love of a husband. What strange egotism in him that could think otherwise!

Long afterwards she remembered this night and the feelings that had dominated her, with tenderest pity for the girl who thought that within such brief space of experience she had plumbed the mysterious deeps of marriage and made herself acquainted with

all the antagonistic elements contained therein, and who felt herself strong to deal with them.

Love had come to her so easily, so generously, and the man she had married was so worthy of her affection, that beyond the difficult spiritualizing of the bond, it had made as yet but small demand upon her. There had indeed been strange moments for her when she had suffered from that faintness of soul which comes to some women in marriage, and from which some never recover — when she had reflected with indignation, at times against man, at times against God, that there must be possibilities of forbidden tragedy within every woman endowed with the nature she was assured it was her crown to possess. Like many another woman, since the day when the serpent beguiled in Paradise, she had pondered, bewildered.

"Christian," she said now to her husband, "do you know that it's a difficult thing to be a woman and make a satisfactory affair of it?"

"I have never thought it was for you," he answered simply. She still sat with her hand in his; he watched the single great pearl rising and falling with the whiteness of her throat.

She sighed. She was thinking of Inderrieden. The qualities in her that appealed to her husband, appealed similarly to him.

"Dear, I was not thinking of myself as satisfying you, but of myself as not satisfying me. Any pretty woman with a respectable mind would satisfy you."

He laughed.

"Yes, but she would."

"Oh, I daresay. I'm not denying it." He laughed again.

"Polygamists, all of you!" she exclaimed carelessly.

She was thinking again. "Dear boy, how shocked he would be if I told him how coldly I have wondered lately whether I couldn't, after all, love another man as much as I do him. What would he think if I told him that I just longed to know — that I had experimented with myself and the experiment — ?"

Christian, watching her, saw the flash in her eyes.

"Aylmer, my darling, don't you know, don't you feel that you have something in you — what is it, child ? — that could drive a man — Oh, never mind! Don't you know, dear, that you're what a man who knows you well enough, will always realize to be — " he broke off; he was thinking of that fool Inderrieden.

"What ?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"What a curious boy!" But sne was glad he had dropped the definition incomplete — she had no wish to hear her character analysed at present.

Suddenly, like a burst of flame in the sky, the thought of Boothroyd shot across her mind. Had she forgotten him — had she forgotten that still meeting in the musty school-room ? Ah!

"Christian, listen to me. Don't you begin to see, dear, that I'm not an easy woman for a man to have as his wife ? I never shall be. And do you know that for months you have been saying to me practically: be content with the butterfly life that fits your station.

Yet you see, *you* are not content though I have lived that life to the best of my ability since I have been here — I have wished to do just as the women about me did."

"Ah, but you haven't," he exclaimed quickly. "You are so different from all these women — things that you do are, somehow, so much more significant because it is you who do them. Don't you understand? — you are not like Mrs. Sessions — There! now you are angry, of course, but, Aylmer, I must tell you — you are, in a way, such an indifferent woman — you care so — so little for — men, but, Aylmer, you have a dangerous sort — No, dear, I don't mean — "

She interrupted him. "You say that I don't care for men. You are quite wrong. I care a great deal, dear — far more than most women do. I should like you quite to understand that."

He stared at her, perplexed.

Suddenly, she broke out at him. "Don't be so sure of everything, Christian. Don't be so certain that I'm a sort of domestic saint, safe on a pedestal of your setting up. It doesn't interest me at all to think of myself as that. I did not seek this life here. You threw me into it. I have found it entertaining, and I understand as I never did before some women I have easily condemned." For a moment she was silent, then she flamed at him irrelevantly — it had become a dominant thought — "Why should one man and his home bound a woman's entire interests and energies. Oh, I tell you, as it is at present conducted, marriage is a stupid, tyrannical institution for the woman."

"Aylmer," he cried imperatively. "Be quiet. You may forget this — I shall remember."

"I want you to. I want you to understand that I have come at last to the point where I am no longer willing to say to you: May I do this or that? For what do you know of me — me? — what do you love in me that any chance man might not? What are you willing to sacrifice for me — of your prejudices, for instance? Not anything, Christian. It outrages your sense — the man's sense — of the fitness of things, that I should even suggest such an idea. Why?"

Christian faced her with dignity. "Aylmer, as my wife — "

" — as your wife — " she laughed softly. "Dear boy, don't! Say instead: 'As Aylmer Forsythe' — one sees things much more clearly that way."

"Oh, you drop the Bronsart, then?"

"Oh, no, dear. Not at all. It's Mrs. Bronsart, but Aylmer Forsythe. So I was born, and so I shall die."

He looked at her, his face suddenly white. "Damn the Forsythe!" he said in the stillest voice. The hatred of the name, inherent in Bronsart blood and bone, at last found bitterest speech.

Aylmer looked at him steadily. "Oh, I don't know," she said presently. "The mother may be a damned Forsythe, but you see the child will be Bronsart. There are compensations." She leaned over and examined intently a rent in the frill of her gown.

"The child!" He stood back, profoundly moved — then stepped towards her. "Aylmer, what do you mean?" It was hard to speak.

"Mean? Why, just what I said? Is it difficult to grasp?"

"Aylmer, my darling, my wife!"

But she held up her hand and warded him off.

"Don't let us talk about it, please."

"But, dear, aren't you — aren't you — glad? Why, I — "

"Glad?" she repeated — "glad?" She made a passionate gesture with her hands. "Oh, how could you ever understand that I have loved to forget — to forget that I was married, sometimes — to think that, after all, I was a girl, and now I never can." With almost a sob, she bent and kissed her bare arm. "And I've been such a nice girl — so sweet and white — " her lips quivered helplessly; she looked at him with eyes in which tears stood.

"But, my darling — "

She stepped far back from him. "No, please, you mustn't kiss me." She shivered. "I couldn't bear to be kissed just now."

"I mustn't kiss you," he repeated — blank.

"No — no! Oh, can't you understand, Christian? — a woman gets so tired of being loved always like that."

"Like what?"

She looked at him in silence for a few moments. Then she said quietly: "Dear, try liking me for a while. I wonder if you could. I like you so much. It's such a satisfying sort of attachment. Any man can love almost any woman under certain circumstances. But one has to think great things of a person to be able

to like them. Did you ever stop and think calmly whether you liked me or not?"

The young man's eyes grew cloudy. "No, before God, I never did, Aylmer. And I never shall. I've just loved you. I'm sorry if it's such an unsatisfactory way of doing. I don't know any other."

He felt himself pitifully sincere. What had come to Aylmer? What did she mean? She had said the strangest things. And now — now — she sat there, aloof from him, in this supreme moment of their experience, when his heart made cry to clasp her close, and said to him: "Like me — it is enough."

He leaned down suddenly — picked up the hem of her gown — laid his lips to it.

"Oh, Christian," she cried, "don't, don't, dear."

"Aylmer," he entreated, "be good to me. Think of this — this that is coming to us. Think of it — a little child — yours and mine."

She sat silent. Yes, it was an Aylmer new to him, but what a beloved, what an exalted, what an appealing Aylmer!

The problem of her temperament — of the large, eager nature scorning the rose-leaf path of existence while some must tread hot ploughshares alone — how easily is was all to be solved by the mystery of the babe at her breast!

"A little child," he repeated. "Oh, Aylmer, Aylmer!"

CHAPTER TEN

YES, Sincerity, but to-night I want to know — I mean to know," said Aylmer.

But the lines of Sincerity's mouth were uncompromising.

"What did that man mean this morning when he said to me that he should think I would hate the Bronsarts more than he did?"

"What man? Child, you talk to strange people."

"I do — these days. I have been to see his daughter who is dying — the father is a cripple — he was injured years ago in the Works. Oh, yes, they settled with him in a way, but after all for years he has been practically supported by this little daughter, and now she's dying — worked out, you know. It was not an easy place to go to at first — they hate us so."

"I don't see why you should go to such places," said Sincerity stiffly.

"Don't you?" It was a wistful question. "You're like some others, Sin. But never mind that now. I want to know about dad. Surely I should know what other people seem to. You see, I always supposed that dad had failed, and that that was why nothing was ever said to me."

"Fail? — your father? Never!"

Yet it took Aylmer a long time to arrive at the whole story, and when she had succeeded in ferreting out the last detail, she sat a long time silent.

"So that was it," she said finally. "They wrecked my poor father's business and in the midst of it all my little mother died."

Then without further comment, she began to talk of trivial things, and Sincerity anxiously watching her, alternated between fear and relief at a calmness possible of the most conflicting interpretations.

"Well, I must be getting home again. No, you needn't walk over with me, Sin." She laid her hand tenderly on the old woman's shoulder. "What a dear you've been to us — first to mother, and always to me."

Yet she spoke lightly, for in this moment of supreme anger she feared the emphasizing of a word, a look even.

"No, don't come down-stairs with me. I'm going to sit in the library a few moments. You think dad will be home to-morrow? Well, good-night."

She ran swiftly down-stairs and going softly into the quiet, untenanted room, closed the door behind her. It was brilliant moonlight — she could see her father's big chair, and opposite it, the smaller one in which she had always known from childhood that no one must sit. Beside it there stood a tall work-basket with a square of copper-coloured satin thrown over it; within lay a little skirt, half embroidered, designed for her in those far-off toddling days of childhood — the needle

remained in it just as her mother's faltering fingers had last left it.

She drew up a chair and sat down between the two empty ones.

And so she sat for perhaps an hour, while she brought things, deep hidden, to the bar.

"I, a Bronsart," she whispered almost aloud once, "and the daughter *of you*."

Ah, but she loved Christian — how she loved him! — and he had had no part in that shameful business.

His father — clever, suave, alert, ever swift to serve her pleasure — how was she to meet him after this revelation?

How had her father met him, day after day, in the intimacy of business for fifteen years and more?

Her father — in transfiguring light his character rose before her — she could have wept at her girlish unconsciousness of its beauty, its power, its silent unswerving devotion to the ideals of truth, of honour. The pathos of his lonely life, scarred with such tragic memories, smote in upon her. It was a nature laid out on heroic lines, capable of suffering not to be comprehended by common clay — he had therefore suffered alone, unsolaced by sympathy, nay, disdaining the heart's cry for it. And in time he had fashioned for his soul's sustaining a superb philosophy of life — he was one with the Infinite — time, with its brief tale of three-score years and ten of pitiful human striving, was linked with an eternity in which faith should tread triumphant those golden streets of whose glory it had been granted rare previsioning, when from the

depths of renunciation it had cried: "I know that God liveth."

Disappointment, failure, the denial of the realization of the powers of which he knew himself possessed — what were these griefs but gifts from the heart of that Wisdom on high which foresaw the end from the beginning — which held ever above the Cross — the Crown! What did it matter to John Forsythe that men like Christie Bronsart sneered at him — that they had used his stern sense of honour to his undoing and their aggrandisement?

An old hymn which she had many a time listened to her father's voice singing rose insistent upon her remembrance:

"A charge to keep I have,
A God to glorify;
A never-dying soul to save,
And fit it for the sky."

Ah, her magnificent old father! Was the endeavour to "fit himself for the sky" worth all the struggle, the self-discipline, those bitter unshed tears of the heart — of a man's strong heart — over his failure to glorify his God with that prestige of worldly success which his ambitious nature had so passionately craved?

His Bible lay open upon the table as he had last left it; in the strong moonlight the heavily marked passages were easy to read.

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed to us-ward."

Of such were the mighty promises upon which his soul reposed serene with the unconscious arrogance of the saint to whom the inner vision has become more vital than all that eye has seen or ear heard.

She read another: "For if we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it."

"Dad, dad!" murmured the girl. She laid her head against the back of his chair, thrilled with a new sense of nearness to him of whose bone she was bone, of whose flesh she was flesh.

The Bronsarts! For one fierce moment she repudiated them all, with their tawdry interpretation of life — their greed of its gauds — their ignorance of its deeper meanings — of the mystery of pain — of the sacrifice of self-surrender to its great ideals.

An immortality? — who dare deny it in the face of a soul's undaunted affirmation of it in its loneliest, loftiest moment? — and what unutterable width of final destiny between the soul which lived to fit itself for the sky, and that one which chose to-day to eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow neither its place nor another would know it again.

The next day brought the laying of the corner-stone of the new hospital in which Christie Bronsart was taking such active interest — which he had indeed promised to "see through." It had occasioned some comment that Boothroyd who was prominent in most of the city's charitable enterprises, should have shown such scant sympathy with this one. His precise attitude toward it puzzled even so clever an analyst of men and motive as Christie Bronsart. And the man

himself — what an enigma he was becoming to some of the faithful in the Church of the Ascension, which Sunday after Sunday was crowded to the doors with a congregation composed largely of the confessedly irreligious, who came apparently to see a man who, in the most subtly disingenuous of all professions, impressed them as undeniably sincere.

This philanthropic occasion became naturally a notable social function; the benefit ball that night passed into local history as the limit of Weston's possibilities in extravagance and display.

At the hour when it was understood that she was to be ready, Aylmer sat before her mirror, superbly arrayed to grace the event. She had sent her maid away, and sat there, idly awaiting her husband. But she stared unheedingly at the radiant reflection of herself upborne before her, and revealed in all its splendour, by the brilliance of a score of electric lights hidden in the hearts of the roses of her porcelain dressing-table — until suddenly, across that stately presence there fell the shadow of a dead girl's face as she had looked upon it that morning in Mead Street.

Unconsciously, she lifted her hand to ward away the vision — it had no place amid this magnificence. But it remained, silent, accusing, inescapable.

And after a long time she rose, the better to see herself in the young beauty and state which seemed to her in this moment of judgment such cruel mockery.

A queen's ransom flashed about her throat — the price of scores of poor human lives.

She looked long and again, as if to brand upon her

conscience this memory of herself as she was, but would never be again.

Then with slow fingers she unclasped her necklace, her bracelets; drew the diamond star from her hair — then looked at her hands — Ah, no! her rings were dear to her, a very part of herself. Perhaps some time — but not now — not yet.

The gems lay before her, a glittering heap upon the dressing-table. She felt a sudden abhorrence of them and of the woman who could rate her poor body, one day to lie still in death as that poor girl's, as worthy such sumptuous adorning, the price of another woman's honour, life.

She sighed; yet she was glad. For she had at last crossed the river upon whose brink she had so long lingered.

The restless steps in the next room quickened; Christian came in, hurried, and eager to be gone.

He looked at her. "By crickets, Aylmer, you aren't ready yet. You want me to clasp them for you?" He laid his hand upon the jewels.

"No, dear." She picked up her long gloves — began to draw them on.

"You want Miriam?" He moved to touch the bell.

"No, dear, no. Yes, we had better hurry. It is late."

"Aylmer, what has struck you? Don't you know that to-night of all nights you'd better decorate yourself with every piece of glass you own?"

She smiled sweetly — sought to evade the question. "Don't you see, dear — every other woman will

do that. Let me be an exception to the glittering mob." She moved to the door.

"In that gown? My dear, simplicity demands white muslin. To the casual beholder you would surely convey the impression that the family had squandered its last dollar on your gown, and had handed your jewels in as security. Your appearance suggests the story of the man who spent so much on his foundations that he had to forego the satisfaction of a roof to his house."

"I daresay, dear. But to-night — this is my wish. Let it go." Aylmer spoke gently.

But Christian set his back against the door; his eyes hardened; his mouth took an expression new to it not long ago, but already threatening permanence. "I should like to know, if I may, Aylmer, what this whim to-night really means."

"What it means?" She was still for a moment; then she added in the lightest voice — so nearly a whisper — "Dear, I cannot wear my diamonds again."

He looked at her steadily — silent; then turned, and opening the door for her politely, said: "Yes, we shall be late unless we hurry."

The drive was short and rapid; during it neither spoke, and when Aylmer went into the Armory her heart was hard against her husband. Why would he not see that it was worth his while — what an expression! — to try to understand her, her needs, the difficulties of her nature to herself?

But no! he desired but that she be sweet, smiling,

superbly clothed — a credit to his taste and to his pocket-book. To him as to most men her conscience hardly existed — oh, his wife must be above suspicion of any sort, of course — but of herself, as existing primarily, that she might develop nobly towards the highest of which she was capable — yes! he understood that — it meant that she was to be to him as nearly as mortal woman might, the perfect wife — to his child, the perfect mother.

Her soft lip curled.

"Oh, Aylmer," said Vonviette, pausing for a moment as she passed on the arm of a clearly infatuated young man, "how stunning you look! And hasn't every woman here about broken her neck trying to out-jewel the next one!"

"Yes, really Aylmer, you are the cleverest woman. — I've always said so," gurgled Mrs. Bronsart; "but people — people, you know my dear, are so dense."

"Yes, but I've not observed that things are less so," remarked Aylmer.

"Things? Things less dense than people? My dear, how could they be? What an unusual idea! But really, your gown, you know — the general effect — positively regal I call it. In your position, too, when every one knows that you just have chests and chests of jewels — and isn't it shocking the way the price of rubies is going up" — Mrs. Bronsart was literally harnessed with them — "Oh, my dear, you're a great success. I quite approve."

Aylmer turned to the man whose arm was awaiting her hand. She flushed deeply.

"What *is* the reason?" he asked. "Not that, of course. I should like to understand."

"Oh, you would only laugh," she answered tremulously. She was uncertain of herself — she felt so alone.

"I — laugh at you?" Inderrieden's eyes were grave.

"It's just this." She made effort to speak calmly. "I will not wear what I could not earn. Why should I? How dare I? — when so many are starved of the barest needs of life."

"I see." His tone was delicately sympathetic. Yet — "What rot!" — he thought.

But what charm, what individuality there was about this woman of moods. He looked towards Christian Bronsart, tall, fair, cold of eye, irreproachable of temperament — just, logical — oh, the very man to set himself like flint against the flame of this woman's poetic, irrational enthusiasms. He smiled unseen.

"Listen! The Melodie in F," he said. "What miracles Sellon has wrought with that band."

"Beautiful!" Band music stirred Aylmer perhaps as no other — the witchery of it in the distance played tricks with her emotions, and now to-night, with this man beside her — this man whose influence upon her was so subtle that she had resisted analysis of it — a dangerous mood captured her.

They were sitting for the moment in an alcove banked with palms and tall-stalked chrysanthemums; she closed her eyes and followed the lilt of the melody

with half-sung note — suddenly conscious — appallingly, audaciously, disdainfully conscious — of the effect of herself upon the man beside her.

Just for the moment — the brief never-to-be-forgiven moment — the devil took her to his high mountain and showed her the fair plains over which she might have dominion.

"Mrs. Bronsart — "

She rose, her face white as her chiffon gown, for Inderrieden had laid his fingers across hers resting on the back of a chair, and for the moment she hardly breathed; a deadly faintness dulled her eyes. Then she came to herself proudly. "Let us promenade," she said calmly. "I see Mr. Boothroyd here. I want to speak to him."

The rector stood slightly aside from the group to which he had been attached — he was watching the shifting scenes before him, absorbed. The eager face, with its brilliant eyes deeply alight, made an effect so living that others about it seemed but blocked from the deadness of clay. And the severity of his clerical garb gave him such distinction of appearance among the gay butterflies surrounding him that Christie Bronsart let fall to his son a somewhat sarcastic comment upon the rector's "damned aristocratic air."

"Why, Mrs. Bronsart," the young man said quickly, "how glad I am to see you. It's been such a long time."

"Yes, we've all been away. You have, too, haven't you?"

A shadow crossed his face. "No, not this summer.

You see" — they were alone for a moment — "I've been looking after Janie Neilson's boy."

"Oh! and you let your vacation go by for that?"

"Oh, yes, yes." His eyes flamed.

She was silent a moment. Then she said: "And have you succeeded in doing anything for him?"

"No."

"And you're still trying?"

"Trying?" He looked at her. Then forgetting, he said deeply: "God, if I might but save that boy!"

Aylmer felt herself suddenly broken with emotion; for a while they watched the shifting throng about them without word, but at last the question aching in her heart found voice. "Where is Lucy Latimer?"

He turned his dark gaze upon her. "In a house of ill-fame on Mark Street." His tone bit to the quick.

"Oh, no, no!" she cried.

"Where else should she be?"

She was silent. But in a moment she broke out upon him: "You are cruel. You don't understand. You make no allowance for — "

"For disobedience unto the heavenly vision? No," he answered calmly. "I make none for that."

The band played a luring strain, and before them the dancers whirled in undulating maze — as long as she lived a few notes of that gay valse brought back the clutch of pain to Aylmer's heart.

"I know — I know," she said breathlessly, after what seemed a long, long time. Then she saw Vonviette approaching. "Will you tell me the number on Mark Street, please?"

He looked at her with eyes grown suddenly tender, pitying — as she had never before seen them. "You remember the text" — he spoke so gently — "Whoso putteth his hand to the plough — "

"Please, the number," she said, as calm now as he had been but a moment before.

"Fifty-three."

Vonviette was upon them like a whirlwind. "Father Boothroyd, you haven't asked me to dance. I feel neglected — hurt."

He smiled vaguely; he was not thinking of this child.

She turned to Aylmer. "Have you seen Erica Rymal? She's here — with us, you know. She arrived this afternoon — direct from Paris. I think Maternal has asked her to spend the winter with us. I'm sure of it because of the extreme pains she is taking to impress upon me that she has done nothing of the sort. It's quite maddening. My only hope is that she'll flirt with Papa Bronsart, and thus worry Maternal as she deserves. Really, parents are a terrible responsibility. It's a dark day for the unsuspecting infant who acquires them."

Aylmer passed on; the rest of the night went over her head as a dream. She saw Erica Rymal dancing with her husband, and when she met them, she smiled upon her radiantly; her thoughts were elsewhere.

"Oh, Mrs. Bronsart, how perfectly sweet, isn't it?" Miss Rymal did not explain what. "You're quite the sensation, aren't you?"

"Am I really?" There stirred in Aylmer the old

passionate contempt of this siren-mannered woman, so striking in her amber gown, with strings of topazes upon the white neck, above which her delicately modelled head with its clouds of blackest hair rose queenly — the clear olive face — cut by the scarlet of thin lips, and lighted by dark unfathomable eyes, which had a trick purposely overdone by a very clever woman, of vanishing under white eyelids, marvellously lashed — had lost nothing of its former capricious charm.

"Yes, you've changed stupendously, haven't you really?"

"Have I? And you, Miss Rymal?"

Later, as the long night grew longer, Aylmer discovered herself wishing with all her soul that Erica Rymal's visit had happened at other moment than this.

"Aylmer, aren't you tired? — *Dear!*" There was unconscious entreaty in Christian's voice — he was suffering, for it seemed to him that again, as it had been in the summer, his wife was dangerously improvident of her sweetness. He longed to pick her up and fly with her far from this cursed ball, where she belonged to the eyes of all men. But there was the band again, swaying into a melody gay, and yet of a haunting pathos, and Inderrieden at her elbow: "Our dance, I think, Mrs. Bronsart?"

"What a charming man, isn't he?" drawled Miss Rymal to Christian, "and quite devoted, isn't it so?"

Night had grown old in the sky when Aylmer and her husband stepped across the threshold of their quiet house.

"Aylmer!" cried Christian as the heavy door closed out the world beyond.

"No, no, not to-night," she said swiftly. "I can't talk to you. I'm too tired. To-morrow — to-morrow there is something that *I* want to say to you."

The short night ended early for Christian; at his usual hour he was ready for breakfast. But when he was half-way down the staircase, he paused — went back, and stepped lightly into his wife's room. She was heavily asleep; he stood and watched her, his stern young face breaking into tenderness. She lay with her head pillowed on the delicately modelled arm, from which the wide lace sleeve had fallen back almost to the shoulder. The line of her throat losing itself in the curves of the young figure which lay so gracefully straight under the coverlet, thrilled him — it was so infinitely pure. And in her face there was such marvel of innocence — awe fastened upon him as he looked.

Mystery of mysteries — Holy of holies — of such was his wife to him in this moment of silence. A man's wife — his child!

But when he met Aylmer at luncheon she made it difficult for him to recall the morning's vision. He could not know that it was the nerving of herself to a momentous resolve, coupled with the woman's fear of the man, her husband, that rendered her so cold.

"There is something I am going to do, Christian," she said, to all appearance calmly. "You remember Lucy Latimer? — I am going to bring her here if she will come."

"Lucy Latimer?"

"Yes. You remember. The girl who used to be in your office. Mr. Boothroyd told us about her."

"That girl?" He looked at her. "What did you say you were going to do?" It seemed impossible that his sense of hearing could be dealing justly by him.

"I am going to bring her here, Christian. I do not wish to do so, however, without first telling you."

He pushed back his chair from the table — yet he remained silent.

"It only came to me last night what I must do for her — I should have known long ago. I was too selfish to know." Aylmer was speaking rapidly now — nervously; her hands bitten into each other.

"You mean that you intend to bring a depraved girl into this house — under the same roof with my wife?"

"Yes, that is what I mean."

Christian waited a moment. Then he said steadily: "I think not."

Aylmer rose from the table. "I have told you what I mean to do."

"Aylmer, I do not understand. Please explain yourself to me."

"There is nothing to explain," she said with a gesture of weariness. "You refuse to understand me, Christian, I have told you before that I do not want to live — I *will* not live — a life of which last night was an example. Listen!" She picked up a book lying on the table beside her — "I have been reading this. This is what a man who ought to know says about us —

us. — 'I have very seldom found a high development of the spiritual life in very rich people; the environment of flattery in which the very wealthy live is death to it.' And this, Christian: 'It is perhaps hard for us to understand how completely these rich men are wrapped up in their financial schemes; how their whole nervous force and intellectual power is concentrated there; how it is almost impossible for them to take a wide vision and see things as they really are. They are bound to look at everything from a financial point of view. The dangerous men are not the masses; but often the men we know and dine with; the men prominent in religious and philanthropic enterprises who are all the time trying to buy something that the law does not allow to be bought and that enlightened public opinion knows to be wrong. These are the men who do not trust the people — men who are always trying to do something that the law does not quite allow— it may be a good and advisable thing, or it may be something unworthy and bad — but their scheming for it is in any case bad. They are doing dangerous work.'"

Aylmer paused a moment; then she said: "You see, Christian, there we are. And you know that the reason Mr. Boothroyd — Oh, I am certain of it — the reason he holds aloof from the new hospital enterprise is because he knows" — she stopped suddenly — she had nearly said a bitter thing, but she had been thinking of her father.

Christian still said nothing — in the moment of a

crisis, and to him this was indeed one, his mind worked slowly towards climax of emotion.

Aylmer turned over a page or two. "Listen to this: — 'On the other hand, I have found the lives of the working people full of stimulus and full of inspiration. Church people are often ignorant of what seems to me very important in the whole movement among the poor people; that in their struggle with capital there is not simply an individual struggle, but there is a constant struggle to lift the whole class. There is a strong class feeling among them of a worthier kind than the class feeling of which I have spoken among the rich. The class feeling among the rich is distinctly limiting — even harmful — I cannot think of instances where it helps and broadens; it tends to make the class smaller; less democratic and less patriotic, because it surrounds them with a vicious atmosphere; whereas class feeling among the poor has an opposite effect. It has a great regard for the under-dog.'"

Aylmer stopped again: "Christian — the under-dog — don't you see that for me, that is Lucy Latimer?"

But Christian made no answer; he was looking out of the window as if interested in what he saw — determinedly cool.

Aylmer turned back to the book, and finished the paragraph. "'There is a quality there of self-sacrifice; a willingness to sacrifice personal interest for the building up of the number which is very valuable.'"

"Is there?" exclaimed Christian in sudden irre-

pressible sneer. "Among the union leaders — the walking delegates, the agitators, for instance?"

The colour rose in Aylmer's face; she turned another page and read in a voice shaken by emotion — "'I know it can be said that there are instances where walking delegates take bribes; but on the whole I can give more instances of fine self-denial in the lives of labour leaders. I have personally known many of these men, and I have known them to cut their salaries almost in half in order to advance the cause for which they were working, and for which they are already insufficiently paid.'"

She read silently over the page the story of the little mother ending in the sentence: "How worthless and meaningless our own lives often seem when contrasted with such lifelong heroism! People do not realize what such a struggle means — it was superb."

Aylmer went over — laid her hand on her husband's shoulder. "Christian," she pleaded, "Christian, *can't* you see! I come of a long line of stern struggling men and women. I need the fight of life, the hardship, the self-denial. I am not a negative character — I am positive, terribly positive. If you cramp me down to the life of a butterfly — I have told you before — Oh, think of it! — I, with my flaming soul might at last learn to live the empty life of a society woman, to seek that sort of triumph, to be satisfied with it."

"You seemed to take to it very kindly last night," he said sarcastically. Yet she had stirred him. "Is it then because you are afraid of the dwarfing of your

own character — because you are afraid of yourself, that you wish to affiliate your energies with so revolutionary a mode of life as you seem to indicate?"

His tone stung; Aylmer flushed — hesitated. Then looked at him, straight.

"Perhaps it is," she said. "I don't know anything about my motives. If you analysed them you would probably find that they are not very heroic. I think that all I know is that for me salvation lies along one road — destruction along the other. I don't know what kind of destruction."

"Ah, you might end perhaps by running off with Inderrieden."

Her face broke into the sweetness of smile. "Not while I had Christian. No, dear, the things I should do would be so much worse than that. I understand quite well how a powerful woman can wreck one man after another — let him love her, and return him nothing — experiment with his costliest emotions — but why does a woman ever do such a thing? Why? The answer lies with you men, who have denied her her rightful development."

"What rot!" exclaimed Christian. "Aylmer, you have lost your balance-wheel. Be reasonable. Admit that you are perhaps in an abnormal state just now. Wait until it passes, and then — then we will see. This is not a time for mad experiments."

"Not for mad ones — no! But for great ones. This of all times, Christian. And you say to me: 'Wait, wait!' while the soul of that girl sinks deeper and

deeper into hell. Oh, my dear, for the sake of my child, help me to do the worthy deed now."

Of all things that she should have become possessed of such an idea! — now, when indeed, he had no wish to antagonize her. But how could he see what she desired as other than impossible?

"Listen, Christian, try to realize how I am driven — that there is a voice that says to me: 'Save that girl.' Oh, perhaps I can't — perhaps it's too late, but Christian, I must try."

"It's Boothroyd," said Christian desperate. "He seems to have a remarkable influence over women — but then any sort of cleric has that. It's the nature of the species — of both species."

Aylmer drew herself up. "Mr. Boothroyd knows little of me," she answered proudly. "I know less of him. My ideas are my own. To any one who has thought much about these dreadful questions — oh, the great one as to what is to be done when I have more than I can eat, while another starves — to any one who has thought much about all this and who has begun to see what might be done, I should seem ignorant and stupid enough. And if I were to ask Mr. Boothroyd what I ought to do, he would say to me: 'That is for you to discover.' He believes, you see, in personal responsibility — in the idea that each one must make answer not to an organization, but to his own soul. As part of an organization he would approve of the new hospital, but alone, to himself, he knows he cannot."

"Why?" asked Christian sharply. He rose and

faced her — in a flash she understood that pleading would be of no avail — that it was to be war — war to the edge of doom between Christian's will and her own in all that concerned those deep, inner longings that she had so pathetically made bare to him.

And her soul rose in high revolt.

"Why?" she repeated. "Why?" — and in that moment the memory of her father's bitter wrong at the hands of this man's father overwhelmed her — "because — because" — her eyes were stormy — "because he knows that it will be built with ill-gotten gain."

"Ill-gotten? — Ill-gotten, you say?"

"Yes, ill-gotten," she repeated deliberately. "Built by Christie Bronsart, but with John Forsythe's or some other man's money. I mean that — filched from him by fraud — by the notable methods of the modern highway robber. *I mean that.*"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

YOUNG Mrs. Bronsart's brougham stood in front of Number 53 Mark Street. The coachman waited, perspiring. What did the mistress mean by vagaries such as these, embarrassing to the soul of a respectable coloured man with a wife and seven children! He had felt driven to remonstrate.

"Pardon me, ma'am, I think perhaps you don't know —" he hesitated, confused. In his eyes Aylmer ranked with angels, in whose presence the mention of certain things was not possible to a man of refined sensibility.

"I know," said Aylmer gently, with a look into his black face as sweet as if served to a prince. "It's terrible, Montgomery, but I must go. There is something there for me to do."

Shaking his head, but obedient, Montgomery climbed to his seat. And now sat there, in front of the indescribable plague-spot, affrighted lest unawares his honest soul acquire some deadly taint from that polluted atmosphere.

And the young mistress had gone in — in there!

But it was long past an hour of waiting before she

came out, her face white, and stained with tears. She had with her a drooping girl.

Montgomery drove them rapidly home, his mind filled with foreboding. No good could come of this kind of thing.

And surely there came to Aylmer a dread sinking of the heart after she had once established Lucy Latimer in her own house. She was appalled at the task she had undertaken. She shivered when she recalled that terrible place — the very air of it had unnerved her — filled her with a deadly fear that prompted her to flee and leave the human wreck to its uttermost destruction. Why should she defile her white hand with this most loathsome of all pitch?

It had called for the utmost delicacy of resource, the utmost passion of entreaty to win the girl's consent to leave the life to which she had thrown herself in her desperate reaction against all that had once been sweet and true in herself. "Let me travel quick — to hell!" that was all that she asked now of Fate.

But with her arms about her, Aylmer had at last conquered. Tears overcame her at the remembrance of the supreme moment. "Lucy, you belong to me and to God. He has asked me to save you, and I must do it." But now that she had the girl actually in her possession, she was staggered by the difficulty of the enterprise upon which she found herself embarked. She felt deplorably in need of advice and help; there was no one to whom she would make appeal for encouragement. And day by day the gulf between herself and Christian widened.

"Christian, why don't you make Erica Rymal let Aylmer alone?" asked Vonviette hotly one evening.

"Let Aylmer alone?" Christian stiffened.

"Oh, yes. You know perfectly well that she's always sticking pins in Aylmer with her hateful little remarks and insinuations. She gives people all sorts of mean impressions. Well, I'd stop her if I were you. You could, you know."

For Christian was seeing a great deal of Erica Rymal. But he was as yet not in the least conscious of how cleverly she was ministering to his dissatisfaction with his wife, nor how adroit were those innocent generalizations which in his mind became at once personal to Aylmer. She never forgot that Christian might have married her; it had now become her intention that he should remember that fact with interest.

And so, without the least determination towards disloyalty, Christian absorbed the impression that he was misunderstood, underrated, and that Aylmer was wilfully bent upon thwarting him. Day by day it became clearer to him that great principles were at stake in this difference of opinion between himself and his wife. If he granted to her such enormous independence of conscience as she demanded as her right, he foresaw in the future no such unanimity of opinion as was *his* right in the home. There of all places a man's will should prevail unquestioned.

Yet to-day in spite of his severely expressed countermand, there was established under his roof this girl of depraved character. It was incredible. He felt

humiliated when his father, who had caught various delicately spiced remarks of Miss Rymal's in regard to the matter, asked him about it. He outlined the situation briefly.

Christie Bronsart smiled whimsically, but sat for a long time considering. He understood more than his son was aware of. At last he said: "Of course, it's the Forsythe working out. You must expect that. But I think you're a little hard on her."

"Me? — hard on Aylmer?" Christian's jaw set with a snap.

"Oh, yes, my boy, yes. When you're twenty years older you'll wonder what you kicked up such a mighty dust about. If I were you I think I'd be pretty considerate of that wife of mine these days. There might come a time when you'd be almighty glad to remember that you had been. I'm not so dead set myself on a man's rights as most men seem to be. It appears to me that the home is the place where the woman has every call to expect to have the say-so. And if a man's married the kind of woman that isn't fit to have it, that's a bill against him that he will have to pay as regularly as his water-tax. But you didn't marry that kind of woman. You married a woman that your boy may be everlastingly glad some day to have had for a mother, and you can bet your last nickel that Aylmer Bronsart's the kind of woman that will never have an insignificant son. Now you'd just better face it that you've got to pay a big price for privileges like that. Or what you'll be damn fool enough to think a big price — now. Lord, the men!"

Bronsart threw back his head and laughed. "Men don't care about admitting it, but we know that when we've married a woman we feel in our souls that we've bought her, and that it's her business to suit. See here, if Aylmer spent thousands of dollars to-morrow on some social foolishness, why, you'd pay the bill, and feel rather proud of her, too. But because she saw a chance to do something for another woman, and had sense enough to realize that there was only one way of going at it — "

"Yes, but what a thing for her to want to do," protested Christian. "And to bring a girl like that into the house!"

Christie Bronsart puffed at his cigar a moment. Then he said: "How we love to lie to ourselves. Your wife, my boy, meets socially any number of men who are responsible for the making of just that sort of girl. You see we know the fellow in the case, and when he proposes to my daughter, and she says: 'Go to the devil!' that jars me badly, because I want to buy up that eighth interest he holds with Grindley in the Blue Phœnix and beat them out of a big thing, and in the meantime it would have suited me to have my daughter polite to him. We're just a damned immoral lot all round when you get down to it. We're shocked at that girl — Oh my! but it's: 'Hello, Kent! You going my way?' Pshaw! The girl's bad, my boy, but the man's 'naughty.' That's the distinction we make. It's a devilish one."

Bronsart got up and looked for his hat and coat. "I'm going to meet my wife at the Art Institute. She

don't care any more about pictures than a hen does, but it's the thing to go and gush over a gallon of green paint worried on to a yard of inoffensive canvas. Oh, she's to be there, in a gown warranted to knock spots off any other woman's, and I'll have to stand around with her, or she'll figure herself out as a disgraced and abandoned wife. Say, Christian!"

"Well?" Christian's tone was uninviting.

Bronsart hesitated. "That Erica Rymal's a pretty slick pussy, isn't she? I tell you the way she purrs around a man makes a copy of the Ten Commandments in his vest pocket almost a necessity. So long!"

"Now, have I been a D. F. of the worst order?" he asked of himself as he walked quickly away from the office. "Guess I have. Sure! But what's a parent to do when he sees his offspring making a blamed ass of itself? Why, sit still and wear a pleased expression if you're a philosopher, and if you aren't — well, then you haven't any business owning offspring."

A carriage rolled rapidly towards him. "Hello! Aylmer and the girl! Gee, she's got nerve!"

He held up his hand to stop Montgomery. "A favour, daughter Aylmer," he said in his most charming manner. "Drive me to the Art Institute, please."

"Ah, you're going there. There are a few beautiful pictures."

"Yes, but I go merely as an accessory to an exhibit. You understand?"

Aylmer laughed.

"It's a great privilege to be permitted to pay the bills of an enterprising woman. I might get lazy and

have visions of retiring from business if it wasn't for that, you know."

"Yes," said Aylmer reflectively. "Have you heard about Mrs. Tom Elliot?"

"No. What?"

"Oh, since he's failed she says she's forced to get a divorce — that of course it's manifestly impossible for him to support her."

"I see. She must have clothes — always been used to 'em. But who's waiting to sign cheques for her?"

"I don't think she has decided yet. She has several aspirants under consideration. Naturally it's very trying to a high-spirited woman to have a husband turn out as Tom has, and she will need to exercise great wisdom in selecting his successor."

"The little — !" Bronsart pulled himself up in time. "And Tom Elliot was one of the best and straightest boys that ever walked. And that high-stepper of his was the daughter of a blacksmith at Gaylard. Poor Tom! When he married her he thought he'd picked the sweetest wild rose that ever bloomed in a hedge. Say, I'm glad you told me this. I'll look Tom up. But he's got to let that wife go if he's ever going to do anything. You won't come in with me? No?"

Aylmer drove on, her heart suddenly tender. Yes, he might be a frivolous, an unprincipled man, but one must make allowance. He had had a terrible fight up, and had come naturally to put the emphasis upon the thing for which he had had to fight hardest. At this

moment she wished that she had spoken less bitterly to Christian.

With the approach of winter she had had to decide what to do with John Stroud. On the whole her garden had been an amazing success. Many of the neighbourhood boys occupied their spare moments at work in it, and were now each night tenderly covering cherished plants from the frost in order to preserve the bloom as long as might be. But what with the coming of the winter, was to take the place of the garden? How were these people to be ministered to by beauty during the long months when they were shut in to the squalor of their homes? She grew to feel in these days a frightened helplessness before the force of the ideals which, uninvited, entered in and took such mighty possession of her. She realized that to her husband she must seem as if actuated by the most calculating malevolence of plan; in reality she but obeyed the inspiration which seemed not to be granted, but to be imposed upon her. She was a piece upon a vast uncomprehended board — the Great Finger indicated her next move and she took it, submissive.

"Christian, is there nothing I can do?" she asked one day, when the longing for the old tender intimacy overwhelmed her. "I am so tired of being unhappy."

For the moment his heart melted to her. Then the memory of a light sneer of Erica Rymal's stung him. His clear blue eyes froze; his jaw squared uncompromisingly.

"My dear," he said with a finely calm air, "you still keep that objectionable girl in the house, I be-

lieve? — and you still retain the flattering opinion you honoured me with in regard to the Bronsarts?"

Aylmer's head lifted. "If you can show me that your firm dealt otherwise by my father than I stated, I shall be glad."

"Really, I am not interested in defending my father. It was merely a question of course, as to which was the better business man. My father happened to be, I have always understood."

Aylmer's face crimsoned. "You know that was not so. You know that was never the question for a moment. Your father is not primarily a business man at all. He is — " she hesitated.

"Oh, please go on."

"No, I will not. But as a business man, my father — "

"My dear," interrupted Christian, "I admit that as a business man your father possesses conspicuous ability. We have found him most useful to us."

The tone itself was sufficient; Aylmer walked out of the room.

A week or two later Christie Bronsart, returning from a trip into the country in regard to some property he thought of buying, met his son driving with Miss Rymal.

"Damn!" he said to himself after he had passed them with a gay word of greeting. "Damn! That's a blow below the belt, Christie. And what are you going to do about it? If that boy was only twenty years

younger I'd take him home and just everlastingly lick some sense into him."

But the next day he went straight to Aylmer. "It appears to me I'm taking things mighty seriously," he reflected in some amazement at finding himself acting thus. For in spite of his vast scheming and anxiety of enterprise he had the optimistic temperament of the gambler and he had been a successful one; care, since his youth had sat but lightly upon him.

But he had spent thirty years of life in acute observation of men and women, and in his memory he harboured some appalling instances of the weakness of his fellows. "There was Colbert," he mused as he walked along: "who'd have believed he'd go to hell over a woman? And Elfring — and Davis, the finest kind of human machine ever set going, and what good was the quality of his works to him when it came to the struggle? He went to pieces over a girl as coarse as crash, and was proud of it."

He sat down beside Aylmer with a beguilingly confidential air. "You see, it's like this," he began frankly. "I didn't sleep last night worrying about you and the boy. Something isn't right, my dear, and I just thought I'd come over and see what we could do about it."

Aylmer drew back. "How do you come to think something isn't right? Has Christian been talking to you?"

"No. I talked to him. I couldn't get any satisfaction out of him, though. There seem to be some things Christian won't talk about even to his father."

Aylmer picked up her work; her lip quivered.

"You see, my dear, between two young people of such decided characters as you and Christian I don't think there's anything out of the way in a pretty strong difference of view at times. Now I don't agree with Christian in his attitude about this girl — in fact, I think he's acting like a blame fool."

"Ah, but the girl is not the question," said Aylmer quickly. The desire to defend Christian — to make out a good showing for him against herself, arose in her instantly.

"Oh, there's something else then? Well, I'm glad of it. I hated to think I had a son who was fool enough to let a little thing like that come between himself and his wife."

Then Bronsart waited, watching her.

But Aylmer sat unresponsive, and so he spoke again.

"You see it's a curious thing what a trifle will sometimes seriously disturb a man's point of view, and while you know better than any one else how completely my boy has been wrapped up in you — "

Aylmer faced him. "What are you talking about? What do you mean?"

Bronsart considered; then he said in a casual tone as he examined the delicate carving on a paper-knife: "A man's such a fool about women, you know. He's always hankering after their sympathy — sending out feelers for it. And if he doesn't get it where he thinks he has a right to expect it — got this in Rome, didn't you? — No? — Geneva? — let me see, what was I

saying? — Oh, well, a man's a fool every time — yes — and by-and-by — just look at the fineness of that bit — Oh, he'll begin to look around elsewhere for what he's hankering after."

Bronsart laid the knife back on the table — he feared he might drop it — he was so horribly conscious of the shock which passed through Aylmer. Presently he got up and walked over to the window, and looked out on the lawn where Hillman was raking the fallen leaves. "You've got the best lawn in the city. Mine can't touch it. I wish I knew Hillman's trick with grass."

He sauntered back to his seat, and then Aylmer looked up at him.

"But not a man like Christian," she said steadily.

Bronsart breathed more easily; he dreaded scenes with women, having had some serious ones in his time.

"Listen, my dear," he said gently. "It took me years of my life to learn that it always pays to tell a woman the truth — most women, that is. Men don't believe that. They'll work thirty-six hours a day inventing lies to tell a woman and think they're smart. Now I came here this morning to tell you the truth. I'm uneasy about that boy of mine. It wouldn't matter about his little differences of opinion with you. That kind of thing settles itself naturally enough if you give it time. But marriage is a mighty exclusive affair. It will never do to let another woman undertake to make your husband think well of himself. That's your business first, last, and always."

"But Christian — "Aylmer was stormed from her self-control at last. "Oh, how can you say such things? A man like Christian — why, Christian cares for me! No other woman could make him happy. Christian! — why, he wouldn't let another woman do that."

"My dear, that would be all right if the situation depended on Christian. But it doesn't. It depends on the other woman every time. That's the mistake a wife always makes. She thinks her husband's loyalty to her must hold him. It would — if there wasn't the other woman. A man's loyalty to his wife and hers to him holds them both through a damned lot of uninteresting experience. But you let a man get a feeling of alienation from his wife, and then let another woman appear on the scene and begin to work on his emotions with every power she's got — and — and — well, I guess that's why I'm here this morning."

"Oh, how — how dare you say such things to me!" Aylmer's eyes were in a blaze — she stood with her hands clasped tight before her as if the impulse to strike were almost more than she could resist. "And you think — you dare to think that a woman like — like — "

"Yes, a woman like Erica Rymal," suggested Bronsart in still the easiest tone. "She's the very mischief, you see. I met her driving with Christian away out on the Harrison road yesterday."

"You met Christian — on the Harrison road — with — Erica Rymal?" The flame in Aylmer's eyes died into a dull haze.

"Oh, yes. But I wouldn't worry about that. It's only that we wouldn't care about their falling into that kind of habit. That's all. Oh, yes, I felt a little hot about it myself last night — you see, I know the girl pretty well — and I said to Mrs. Bronsart after I got home: 'Look here, it seems to me you don't seem in the best of sorts lately. You need a change of air. Suppose you and Vonviette go south for a while.' I wanted to shake Miss Rymal — she's stayed in this town about long enough to suit me. Well, you could have knocked me down when my wife said: 'Why, yes, I think I'll go, and isn't it fortunate that Erica is going to board with the Sterrits — she says she wants to study with Mr. James, and she couldn't think of imposing so much noise on us.'" Bronsart was silent a moment; then he added: "You see the girl has laid her plans. She knows just what she's after."

Aylmer looked at him; the pain in her eyes gripped him hard.

"Child, I almost think if I were you I'd be inclined to make some concessions. After all, life's a great system of compromise, and it's a wise one who knows when to give up what's perhaps a right. That girl now — Oh, I approve of what you've done, but I'd think it over, my dear. It's a question whether it's a wife's duty to alienate her husband for the sake of doing good to somebody else, isn't it? You might be able to devise some other way of taking care of the girl."

"Yes." Aylmer hesitated; she was terribly shaken — more than she had yet had time to realize. "But you see" — with what kindly anxiety her father-in-

law was looking at her — how good he meant to be — "as I told you, the girl is not the main difficulty."

"Oh no, no! So you said. Then I'm all out of my depth." He paused. "Of course you may not feel able to tell me what the trouble is then, but if you could — perhaps — "

Afterwards Aylmer wondered how she could have been guilty of such a thing. But at the moment her mental confusion was extreme, and this man was so sane, so hardily philosophical — she had never thought of him as sensitive.

She looked towards him — helpless, appealing.

"Why, it's about you. We had an argument — Christian and I — about — about things that happened long ago — and I think — I think I called you a highway robber. Yes, I did."

There was a frightening silence. Then: "The devil you did!" said Bronsart. His lips scarcely moved. Then slowly, his face hardened — hardened until all the shrewd cynical, bitter lines which the conflict with life had etched so indelibly upon it revealed themselves — sharp, unmerciful lines.

"The devil you did!" he said again even more quietly than before. The red grew deep in his face.

Then he got up. "Really, I must apologize for having intruded upon you in this way. It was quite unnecessary, wasn't it? I will not transgress again."

He bowed formally, and went towards the door, and Aylmer watched him helplessly, stricken wan with the feeling that she was being deserted by the

only friend she had. What had she done? Why — an impossible thing!

But at the door Christie Bronsart paused. Then he walked over to the window, and looked out again at Hillman, still monotonously raking leaves as if nothing had happened. A great struggle began in him. The red faded from his face; it grew white.

But the moment came when he turned back to Aylmer. "Child," he said in a strange tone as he laid his hand on her shoulder, "you've given me one of the sharpest stabs I've ever had. I'm glad of it. To me, it helps a little to even the score. But we'll let that pass. You're my boy's wife. I came here to-day to help you both, and I won't let any feeling of mine stand in the way if I can help it."

A great wave of emotion passed over Aylmer, and left her trembling.

"I'd be a fool, child, a poor fool if I let what — what you said come between me and what I should do for you two children. There's your father — he's got a great celestial scheme that uses up lots of time and money for keeping himself righteous. I haven't, you see. I don't have to get myself all worked up into a state of emotion in order to understand that you're a fool if you do some things, and a wise man if you don't. Now, of course, you can monkey around with this situation and lash yourself into all kinds of experiences over it, and all that. But there is only one conclusion for you to come to, and in the end you'll come to it. But if you take my advice, Aylmer, you won't waste time just now."

"You mean — "

"Simply this. You've offended my boy. Just go to him and say that you take back what you said about his father — his father, remember."

Aylmer sprang to her feet. "Never!" she exclaimed. "I will never do that."

Bronsart eyed her steadily. "You're a fool, Aylmer, when you talk like that. Take it back. Take it back."

Her indignation choked her. "I — take that back? — that you ruined my poor honourable father — that you — "

Bronsart held up his hand. "Not from you to me, Aylmer." There was an admirable dignity in his manner.

He had been interestedly aware of himself as incongruously feminine and unmasculinely intuitive during this interview. But he had long ago learned to value jealously those moments in which he found nothing escaping him — they were the great moments to which he owed the inspiration of some of his most daring schemes — of his subtlest plots. A problem always interested him, and this one happened to concern him. He would have regarded the present crisis as unimportant if he had not been intimately acquainted with the nature of the stock from which Aylmer sprang. "Once let these people get a thing into their heads as a matter of conscience and you're fixed," he reflected.

Furthermore, there was to be considered the stock from which his son sprang. He was not sure that it was not more dangerous in this present emergency than the other. He was aware of certain tragic weak-

nesses in his own character which had carried him close to the pit's edge more than once — which would have carried him over it, but for the stern training of his youth which came to the top in him at unexpected times. But his son had lacked all that — there had been no influence to lay the firm foundation upon which the man must some day feel his feet or sweep with the current.

And to-day, for his boy, he had infinite fear of the current. He was a philosopher of a high order, and a successful man largely because he had learned early to take people as they were — he had never made the mistake of trying to manipulate them as creatures of his imagining. And it was one of his pet theories that it was not nearly as important to know a man's weak points, as to be certain you comprehended his strong ones. But for his boy — Ah, how he feared the weak spot he knew so well in himself.

"Listen, my dear," he now said gently to Aylmer. "I know much more than you ever can about the way I treated your father. It was the great mistake of my life. I suppose every man, even the wisest, looking back, can put his finger on some dark spot in his memory. That is my dark spot. I would give a great deal to wipe it out. When you married Christian I thought that would do it for me. But lately I have wondered pretty anxiously whether the big wrongs we do are ever atoned for without violence somewhere — it may be upon the innocent."

"Why, you — you — I did not know you ever thought like that," faltered Aylmer.

What he had said touched her deeply as a confession unlooked for from such a source — impelled from him by the position she had taken. She was unconscious of herself as in the hands of a man who had spent his life manipulating his fellows. And he had never felt it more important that he should manipulate with skill than just now.

The line in himself between the real and the assumed was obscure even to Christie Bronsart. He was seeking a certain end — automatically now he helped himself to whatever means occurred to him as likely to assist in its attainment.

"How could you misunderstand me so!" he said simply.

CHAPTER TWELVE

BUT you did not expect happiness — what is called happiness when you undertook so momentous a line of duty as this' ?' asked Boothroyd.

Aylmer had met him at Mrs. Arkell's, and had offered to drive him uptown. It was a bitter winter afternoon — the wind drove in edged through the ill-fitting window-sash in the sick woman's room.

"Oh, this is dreadful!" exclaimed Aylmer. "I shall see that you have a double sash at once."

"Oh, Tim's got one all ready to put up," said Mrs. Arkell quickly. "He would have had it up yesterday, but John Stroud came over for him last night in such a stir — the heater wasn't working right in the greenhouse" — Aylmer had at length decided to build a large conservatory across the end of her garden lot — "and I guess they fussed away there until after midnight. When Tim came in at last, I said to him: 'Guess you'd rather get froze yourself than see one of them plants injured.' You know he and Stroud 've got it all planned — Tim's to carry me over Christmas Day to see it, and they're just working to have every thing looking as fine as may be. And just think of it —

why, I ain't set foot over my door-step in years." She laughed delightedly. "You see, all last summer I could see them flowers just lying here. It was a great time for me. And I've missed 'em so, my! Flowers is a good deal like children I guess, if you once get your mind set on 'em."

"Happiness!" repeated Aylmer in answer to Boothroyd's question as they drove along. "No, I wasn't seeking that. But — " she went no further.

"You see, it's but a matter of living up to the highest one has grasped," said Boothroyd. "Just from day to day."

"Yes, but there are complications. Isn't it perhaps selfishness to seek to live your idea of the highest when another with a different idea of life might be alienated from the best of which they were capable, because you — you assumed that yours was the higher ideal?"

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed Boothroyd. "Don't be misled into thinking that. It is the devil's best argument — compromise, compromise. Never listen to it."

The carriage turned in at the gate. "Come in with me," said Aylmer. "You're cold. I'll give you a cup of tea."

The warmth of the house was in grateful contrast to the bitterness of the snow-smitten air without; the soft green of the library a rest to eyes weary from the white glare of the wintry streets, and the deepening twilight invited speech which under other circumstances might have seemed impossible.

"Compromise — how I loathe it!" said Boothroyd.

"Ah, yes. But in marriage — it is all different.

Things that hold elsewhere don't hold there." Aylmer leaned forward and looked at the young man with wistful brown eyes. "Do you know — it is so hard — to be a woman — satisfactorily to one's self I mean."

An emotion such as he had never before experienced took possession of Boothroyd.

"Ah, you think perhaps, that I should not have said that?" Aylmer felt embarrassed by a change of feeling which she immediately divined in him.

"I — oh, no!" he answered somewhat coldly.

This then — this — was that tension of the nerves for which men bartered their common-sense — nay, ultimately, their souls if need be.

"You see," she continued, her eyes still fixed upon him, the soft colour creeping into her cheeks — "a man expects his wife to please, to charm him. He married her for that. Not at all because she was wise or because she was even — good."

Ah, yes! a woman's charm — vague, capricious, intangible, but what a force!

"And do you see how terrible it is when you feel how you would despise yourself if — if — " but her eyes filled with tears.

"Yes, I see," he said quietly. His young, dark head seemed for all its strange inflexibility of pose to express at the moment an extraordinary intensity of the sheer force of living which lifted it realms above the mere condition of being alive. "Yes, I think I understand. You mean that you would despise yourself if you used what is finest in you as a means, however desirable the end — if you trafficked, as it were, in what

should be above all things, spontaneous, divinely free from the flaw of calculation, of planned-for result."

Aylmer nodded; she could not trust herself to speak. This question had become her battle-ground.

The young man rose. "Oh, never, never do that," he said in low intensity of tone. "Never stain yourself by such perjury. Be true to the noblest in you at whatever cost. In the end, all else fails."

"Yes, but I have done as you say, and I see myself losing all — all!" Her voice trailed, ragged, into the silence. Yet presently she spoke again, falteringly. "And then I think of wiser women than I who have held what — what they cared for most — by every art, by every stratagem even, and — "

"Ah, yes, and one soul is sacrificed for the other," interrupted Boothroyd, suddenly in a blaze — "but that other is not thereby saved. Don't let us deceive ourselves as to that. No human being rises to nobility of character through any degradation of another — not even of a wife — " but he left that unfinished. "Compromise — it is the coward's road. It is not for you to travel."

"Ah, I see Vonviette and Miss Rymal coming. What shall I do?" She looked at him in unconscious entreaty. "I don't know how I can see her to-day."

But when they came in, she met them in her usual manner.

"Ah, a twilight tête-à-tête, is it not?" drawled Miss Rymal in her charming voice. "Your parochial cares, Mr. Boothroyd, they weigh you down, *n'est-ce pas?*

One feels sorry for the overworked clergy, don't you think?"

The young man turned his dark eyes upon her; it was what she desired. She was garbed in a long trailing coat of silvery grey velvet, which, with a rather magnificent air, she threw back, revealing the softness of a chinchilla facing which extended to her feet. Her huge picture hat was weighted with enormous grey plumes beneath which her cloudy masses of dark hair made frame about a face lovely with the colour of a peach long warm in the sun. Her dark velvety eyes met the rector's gaze full — then slipped under those white narrowing lids whose long lashes gave to her at times an enchanting youthfulness and innocence of expression.

"Well," said Vonviette with a decided breeze in her manner, "I don't know why Father Boothroyd shouldn't pay some attention to the rich and perishing of his flock. He's distressingly attentive to the poor and righteous. I've a great mind to do a little housebreaking, or to put up a 'Scrubbing done here' sign on our front door, in order to command something of his attention and regard. That is unless I take the veil, which I've been considering doing lately."

"You!" exclaimed Aylmer.

"Oh, of course you all smile, but don't you see that really, that is quite the natural thing for me to do? The spoilt child of luxury — the creature of caprice — why, it is simply inevitable. Every now and then I go down and have a talk about it with Sister Mary Frances. We're great chums. Oh, you'll

see yet, even if you do sit in the seats of the scornful now."

"Dear child, don't talk so," said Aylmer with a tender smile. She was fond of this petulant little sister-in-law.

"By the way, Mrs. Bronsart, will your husband have returned before Wednesday?" asked Boothroyd suddenly, after a slight chat with Miss Rymal, in which he had impressed her as more polite than pleasing. "There is a matter about which it is important that I should see him."

"Yes — yes, I think so," replied Aylmer. But there was hesitation, embarrassment, in her manner.

"Oh, pardon me," said Miss Rymal, in her laziest voice, "I think not until Thursday — possibly Friday indeed."

There was silence in the twilight room.

"At least so he said in his letter to me this morning," she added.

For the longing to stab, to cut deep into this proud wife, who suffering, made no sign, rose high in her envious heart.

Long ago, as a little dark-eyed cherub of a child, she had tormented everything capable of feeling within her reach, from the fly whose legs it had been her delight slowly to remove, to the children who learned to shun her as a playmate. "I never knew no good come of a pinching child," an old nurse had once said of her. "A pinching child makes a mean woman."

She pinched with her fingers no longer, but with

her tongue, and the men who admired her had flattered her into mistaking insolence for wit.

To Aylmer, for one dread moment, the world stopped on its way through space. Then she turned to Vonviette and made some indifferent remark, which Boothroyd instantly took up, and the suspended sphere swung slowly forward upon its allotted groove again.

But as he said good-bye to her, the rector looked steadily at her for a moment. He wished her to know that at last he understood.

Alone in the Bronsart carriage — for Vonviette had declared her intention of staying to dinner with Aylmer — the carefully cultivated expression of Erica Rymal's face relaxed — irritation, discontent preyed hawk-like upon its rounded youth, and gave shrill signal of the face of twenty years from now.

She was not proud of herself. She had stabbed vulgarly, where she had need but to wound with delicate, poisoned weapon.

What folly! What need to stab at all? Events would do that for her.

Boothroyd walked rapidly away from the house, his mind and heart struggling with Aylmer's difficulties. But at last with determined effort he dismissed her from his thoughts. "It's a great nature seeking the light, and it will find it without any help from me. And that is the only way. We may be helped towards the best, but we must attain — make it our own — always alone."

"Alone!" — he repeated the word as if he loved it.

In truth he did. It was a temperament that unconsciously deceived. In his pulpit, among his people — down in the festering alleys where children swarmed about him, he gave the impression of a nature warm, companionable, close to the human kind. In his sermons, in his tender homely speech to outcast souls, he seemed to give of his very heart. In reality the deeps of him were hardly stirred by the life about him, which seemed to make such demand upon his emotions. The man within lived a life closed to the passer-by, which only gave hint of its existence in the prayers — those extraordinary extempore prayers, just before his sermon — which moved men without their understanding why. Beneath the mask of youth with its eyes so keen upon the world of men and things, the soul of the born ascetic, of the mystic, ruled mightily thus soon. For him the great note had been struck with no uncertain sound.

"But suffering — suffering — " a man said to him one day — a man upon whom from Boothroyd's point of view a cruel wound should have made noble scar — "you idealize it — apotheosize it — your theories of life are founded upon it. It's a morbid way of looking at things."

"Do you call me morbid?" retorted Boothroyd. "Do you know a man who gets more, honestly more out of life than I do?"

Yet it would have puzzled him to prove the truth — even to himself — of that statement. For he was so often conscious of himself as passing through life an alien — of belonging elsewhere — a mental condition

which was incidentally an enormous source of power to him. A child crying with the cold stirred something in him — he was never sure what — he soothed it and went on his way battling with the ever-present — the great question: What did it matter, cold or heat, pain or pleasure, agony or ecstasy? — and then stopped on the next corner to try to bring a smile to some weary woman's face.

Perhaps his bishop had grasped the complexities of his character as nearly as any one ever would. "To himself he will analyse everything, but to his people he will analyse nothing — explain nothing. It is a powerful stand to take. And he will 'compel them to come in' by the force of a temperament which has led every great spiritual movement the world has ever known. If he lives he will be the greatest ecclesiastic this country has produced. He will set religion back upon a rock — but what rock? Ah! will he know?"

And the bishop had looked long at the young face, the young figure, with its glow, its throb of rich red life. "And what white intensity, what passion for sacrifice, renunciation, and beneath all, what amazing indifference, what coldness, what slight, curious strain of cruelty — the qualities which always lie deep in the characters which accomplish. Tact? — almost the most needful ingredient in the daily round of the ecclesiastical calling. No, he has none. It is the lightweights in brain who need that. This boy will ride roughshod to his goal — he will command the right of way."

When Boothroyd reached the place which served

him as a home, he found a letter lying on his study table. He opened it to read, scrawled on a half sheet: "That girl has got him again."

"Oh, God!" he sighed; a breath of agony passed over his face.

What passion of endeavour he was putting into the saving of that boy! Why?

He considered; and slowly, critically separating one motive from another, he perceived that the redemption of this life had become to him the great test of his fitness for his calling. He had no faith in the systems which undertook the salvation of humanity by machine — a gross at a time. The results of that theory might be statistically fascinating, but there, from his point of view their utility ceased.

Ah! — to take this boy, son of a common, ignorant mother, of an unknown father — this boy upon whom foreordination to sin, to final destruction seemed stamped — to help this mortal to put on the immortality of righteousness — to return him to the great Judge, pure, incorruptible, redeemed!

Who could predict the worth, the infinite value to its fellows, of one life thus uplifted?

But was the cheap stuff worth the saving?

Had the Master asked that question before He stooped from immeasurable height to heal?

The streets were treacherous with sleet, and when he stepped out after hurrying through his evening meal, he boarded a car going in the direction of the church, where there was to be a vestry meeting which it was expected he would attend. He sat through its

tedious trivialities with indifference, but towards the close of the hour he began to be aware that things were being said which indirectly concerned him. Indeed, it occurred to him after some listening, that the tone of the meeting was distinctly hostile to the plans of the present administration.

There was Bronsart — smiling, alert, silent — yet by gesture delicately deprecatory when Wardrope spoke of their church as in danger of "vulgarisation by the mob."

After that, Boothroyd sat straight. Was this, then, the beginning of a definitely concerted movement against him, inspired by Bronsart, who would probably never appear in it — who would merely direct unseen its every manœuvre?

Well, it was but what he had to expect. But his heart grew sore. He looked sharply at the faces of the men about him — keen, prosperous men of the world. These were the directors of an enterprise which had for its aim the spiritual uplift of humanity.

What knew they of that vision of the soul which alone gave greatness to life — which transformed poverty into riches, sorrow into joy, greed into generosity, hatred into love?

A divine pity filled his heart and found voice upon his lips in the prayer with which he was called on to close the meeting. "O Christ, why dost Thou reveal Thyself to but one here and another there, in all Thy great world? Is there not enough of Thy truth for all? Nay, Lord. We beseech Thee to make Thyself known unto us all, Thou Christ who sought and saved that

which was lost, outcast, despised — Thou Christ who companioned with sinners, who fed with the bread of life the multitude whom Thy disciples would have turned from Thee an-hungered."

But it was a prayer destined not to be overlooked by some of the saints who heard it. As Mr. Wardrope said: "Such abuse demanded explanation—apology."

But Boothroyd heard nothing of this; he hurried away, those few scrawled words on the half sheet uppermost in his mind again. He took the car for that section of the city which lay low along the river's edge; then he walked up and down peering into this saloon and that — watching, scrutinizing every figure that slouched along the squalid street, brilliantly lighted just here by the alluring dens which lined it. He knew the boy's possible haunts well.

"I suppose you haven't seen Neilson to-night?" he asked of the policeman on the beat — they had had many a midnight talk together.

"Passed me 'long about twenty minutes ago, sir. Had that André girl with him. Guess you'd find them at Breitmann's."

Boothroyd nodded, and went on.

Inside the dazzlingly lighted room he paused a moment, until his quick eye located Neilson, sitting with the girl at one of the little round tables at the far end. As he strode towards them many men and most women turned to look at him; it was a figure not to be ignored in that environment.

"Neilson," he said quietly — he bowed courteously to the boy's companion — "may I join you?"

He beckoned to the waiter and ordered a glass of beer.

Neilson's face flamed scarlet. But the girl tossed her head. "Honoured, I'm sure," she said pertly.

Boothroyd drank his beer slowly with a careful air of preoccupation while he furtively studied "the André girl."

She was dangerously pretty — a daintily graceful brunette with an acquired complexion of charming pallor, the effect of which she had heightened by the narrow, straight, intensely black line of eyebrow, and the vivid scarlet of her lips. She was clothed with a skill which betrayed the artist, a view of herself which Boothroyd reflected would probably have filled her with amazement if not contempt. Yet there the gift was, going to waste — no, being prostituted in an awful cause. He looked at her hands — delicate, white, wicked little hands.

And then suddenly, he became aware that she was studying him; perhaps with her cheap, tragic knowledge of the frailty of men she was wondering if he, too, were not vulnerable.

And in the moment, she tossed her head again, and laughed softly. It was a laugh to remember.

"My girl, you're wrong," he said.

"Well, did you ever!" she exclaimed. Then threw him a defiant, sparkling look.

For he was but another man; the men she knew well and by whom she judged all were those who courted temptation.

Boothroyd's courage almost failed him. This was

no slow-witted siren who had got her clutch upon the boy. It was a little devil, born and trained in the pit, who would exhaust every expedient of her vile art before she let go of such choice young prey. And the boy — he was so clearly proud of himself — so eager to be the clay for this relentless potter's misshaping — so intoxicated by the hideous charm he had neither years, nor knowledge, nor will to analyse.

Was his delirium strange when one reflected what dark secrets those thin red lips could reveal of the dishonour of men of middle age, whose families regarded them as protectors of feminine excellence?

The stream of life was so young in these veins; was it wonder that to-night, under such stress, it flowed hot, turbid?

Neilson beckoned to the waiter — he ordered more beer. And Boothroyd waited, his heart sick with contempt of himself, of his cowardice, of his lack of resource.

Suddenly, he leaned over. "Neilson," he said in a curiously still voice — he was listening to his own heart beat — "I want you to come home with me."

Neilson looked at him, his face a blaze of defiance. "I'll trouble you, sir, to mind your own business."

"This is my business," said Boothroyd, still in the same tone. "I shall not leave you to-night. If you do not come with me, I shall go with you."

Instinctively, he turned towards the girl. An irrational feeling overpowered him, that surely she, a woman, with somewhere in her poor body a woman's

soul, must understand that this tormented boy must be held back from destruction.

She met his eyes squarely. "I hate you," she said in a tone as quiet as his own. Then she stood up. "Come on, Dick, let's go."

She had sudden dread of a scene; she had too much respect for herself to stand that.

She walked out quickly. When the two men reached the street, she was nowhere in sight. With an oath Neilson turned upon the rector, then as quickly turned away. But Boothroyd's hand was upon his arm — a grasp as of steel. "Let me go," panted the boy.

Boothroyd tightened his hold.

"Damn you!" Neilson wrenched this way and that; it seemed as if his muscles cracked and split. But at last Boothroyd pinned him exhausted against the sleety wall. "Dick, you're going home with me, boy. If I can't persuade you to do that, I must force you to it. For you must go."

Hours later, in the chill deeps of the night, he sat beside the lad asleep upon his own bed, and looked long at the young face upon which innocence was still unobliterated. What was to save him? — to give him strength to fight the awful forces of his nature?

Yet beneath all the weakness inherited and acquired, there was something strong, something which struggled after righteousness within the boy. Again and again he had touched it to-night; he was sure of it. "My poor Dick! my poor Dick!" he murmured. In the fierce duel of that night he had learnt much

about Neilson, and he studied now in critical appreciation, the head with its dark, crisply curling hair, the fine sweep of the brow, the thin line of jaw, at once so weak and so strong — the mouth with its restless, clever lips. Ah, this boy's mother had given him life, but he did not belong to her. Where did he belong? What human being, careless of catastrophe, had set this priceless freight adrift upon the uncharted storms and passions of life? A mighty tenderness welled up in Boothroyd's heart.

Somewhere in life the boy's father went his untroubled way, a credit to society mayhap, but nevertheless, a soul fattening in flesh for hell. He had purged his heart, belike, of the sins and follies of his youth, but this boy was to bear the bitter fruits of them about with him as long as life endured. The sacredness of human life! — there was nothing so vilely profaned by man.

The woman! — it was the great question, the final test, before which every man must, sooner or later, stand or fall. The boy here, quivering and moaning in his uneasy sleep, gave evidence, even in unconsciousness, of the power which mastered — made fools of — however legally and morally, about six men out of every ten.

He thought of Erica Rymal — Ah, the difference between her and "the André girl" was but that of circumstance — the heart of one was no more depraved than that of the other.

In this still hour the problem of righteous judgment perplexed him as never before. Who dare lay claim to

clean hands and a pure heart? What taint of vulgar ambition lurked hidden in noblest attainment? The martyr, dying at the stake, how often had he gloried in the obstinacy which crowned him with endurance? And how often had the hero been, but for accident of fate, a coward?

Ah, there came to him at last swift vision of Aylmer, as he had looked upon her that afternoon when she had appealed to him, her tender brown eyes wistful — everything about her, from the softness of her heavy hair, the pathetic twist of her lip, her little trick of slipping the rings up and down her slender fingers; the faint perfume, the teasing rustle of her silken skirts, the slim, daintily shod foot — every delicate, unconscious grace of hers a joy to the soul of man, and a menace to its peace.

He had seen so much of her — had watched so unsuspected her long struggle to gain possession of her soul — had rejoiced with a joy she was never to know aught of, in that nobility of character which refused happiness at the cost of honour — and now, to-night, he saw already before him the parting of his way with hers.

Perhaps because of that, because, too, of the weariness of soul and body unnerving him, he gave way as never before to the clamour of his heart for the delirium of dream, for the envisioning of all that was denied to him.

But no! not for him — not for him. For him the lonely road, the silence of unshared pilgrimage, the heartsickness of uncheered toil.

So be it! It was the road that he chose. Were toil, loneliness, the ache of the unsatisfied heart not in very essence the ingredients of those priceless fruits of the spirit — Joy, Peace?

The boy beside him moaned; he laid his hand tenderly, strongly, on the hot, restless head.

"Oh, Dick, Dick," he murmured, "I can, I can — I will save you, boy."

He knew it, for in that high moment, he surrendered himself, "obedient unto the heavenly vision."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

FORSYTHE looked at his daughter in the calmness of great amazement.

"And, my dear, you mean to tell me that you actually defied your husband — that you brought into his house a girl whom he had forbidden you to bring there?"

The colour rose in Aylmer's face. "Then have I no rights, dad?"

"Rights, my dear, rights? Is that a word to use? As a wife, can you — "

"Ah, don't think of me always as a wife, dad. Think of me as an individual — as the woman Aylmer — has she no right of judgment, no right of duty to herself — to the needs she understands in herself as no one else can?"

"My dear, I don't think you realize how selfish what you say sounds. I do not understand how you can possibly place your idea of duty to yourself, whatever that may mean, against your evident duty to your husband."

"But, dad, there is no question at all for any human being when it concerns that of duty, save duty to himself. Don't you see what I mean?"

Forsythe shook his head. "My dear, all I do see, is that you have been a very foolish girl — a very wilful girl."

Tears sprang to Aylmer's eyes. It was bitter to her that her father, of all others, should deny to her all independence, all right of judgment — all part in the great thinking machinery which moulds human action.

But after a while she said with a new note in her voice: "Dad, suppose that the question at issue between me and Christian should have been one that concerned my religious belief — suppose for instance that I had found it impossible to give up the Presbyterian faith in which I was reared — would you have said that I then, had no right of judgment, no duty to my own conscience?"

There was no hesitation in Forsythe's reply. "That is an entirely different matter, as you know. Religion is a question between the soul and God. No one may interfere there."

"But the question is, dad, what is religion?"

Forsythe looked sharply at his daughter. "My dear, I quite understand where you would drive this argument. It won't do. Religion and philanthropy are not one and the same thing, though it is the fashion nowadays to pretend that they are. A fancy dress ball is a much pleasanter pastime to those who are at enmity with God than a prayer-meeting, and when it can be made to masquerade as a means of doing good, people whose consciences are not quite dead, feel much relieved. But God is not mocked. And you, in a way

that astonishes me, are magnifying your mere wilfulness into a matter of conscience. I do not say that the reformation of a sinful girl is not a worthy endeavour, but it becomes most unworthy when persisted in, in defiance of your husband's desires."

There was silence until Aylmer said in a low tone: "What a degrading thing then, it is to be a woman!"

"Aylmer!" protested her father, shocked.

"No, I will alter that remark." She looked at her father with eyes that flamed. "What a degraded thing, you and the men who think like you would make a woman. No, dad, you must let me talk. I am your child; I have heard Sincerity say, time and again, that in every way I was more like you than like my mother. And what is it that marks you out among men? Your clear brain, your strong will, your fine conscience. You know that. And those qualities you have handed on to me. You know that, too. But because your child happens to be a woman, because she is a wife, she must not use her great gifts of mind and conscience and will — she must subordinate them to the will and the mind and the conscience of the man whose name she bears. Why?"

Forsythe looked at his daughter without answering.

"I have considered that 'Why?' a long time," continued Aylmer. "And I have never got a satisfactory answer to it. The answer that it is my duty as a wife is no answer. Why is it my duty as a wife? Because it is a wife's duty to please, to minister to her husband's self-content, to his self-esteem, to his sense of authority. Why? Because she is the wife and he the husband.

Do you see? — one gets no farther. It always comes back to that, and it won't do. Think of me, dad" — she threw her head back — in spite of his anger his old heart beat with sudden pride in her, in her noble youth, her undaunted independence — "think of me, a woman with 'a heart aflame to be right,' to do justice as far as I can see how, to the poor, the afflicted, the outcast — a woman who craves the hardships of service — a woman who longs to feel that her day and generation shall know a little less suffering, a little less loneliness, because she has lived in it — think of me, all that, and then think of me, told to live a life of ease, of parade, of social brilliance — because — because it is my duty as a wife." The contempt in her voice scorched. Yet the next moment she was in a passion of tears. "And you think, perhaps, because I say all this, that I don't love Christian. Don't you see — can't you see, that it is because I love him so dearly that I know that it can never be a service to the best in him, the noblest, that I should degrade myself by deceitful subservience to him, that I should for the sake of the peace that I long for, pretend to him that I believe what I do not."

"Child, child, how recklessly you court misery. You have a haughty spirit. It is that I fear which keeps you from seeing, how like a wise woman, by the exercise of a little tact, you might get what most women get — your own way."

"Oh, dad, dad, don't you understand that it is just that, that I should hate," exclaimed Aylmer, throwing out her hands in a hopeless gesture. "A wise

woman? I shall never be that. I despise the tact you speak of. It makes women cowards and deceivers. I am not selfishly seeking my own way. Can't you see that?"

"No, I can't," said Forsythe abruptly. "I see a headstrong girl, throwing away the advantages and gifts of a great position — alienating her husband, and stirring up opposition in his mind, doubtless, to much that he would otherwise approve of."

Aylmer sat silent; she was deeply offended. She would never have mentioned her difficulties with Christian to her father — the knowledge had reached him at last from other sources — but often, in her loneliness and sadness, she had comforted herself with the thought that if he knew he would understand and sympathize.

And now — she felt sudden contempt for that faith of his, so isolated from the stern facts of life, so spiritually superior to its common griefs. In this short hour, a great gulf had sprung between her and her father; across it she looked at him for the first time in her experience with the cold eyes of the critic.

"Perhaps as you know so much now, I had better tell you as I told Mr. Bronsart, that the great difficulty between Christian and myself arose originally not so much over Lucy, as over what I said about that old affair between yourself and him." She could not resist the temptation to make her father perceive that the question at issue was not altogether a personal one — that it was practically the case of Forsythe *vs.* Bronsart.

"What?" exclaimed Forsythe. The very mention by his daughter of that hidden anguish, that unredeemed humiliation, cast the shadow of added years upon his strong face. "What do you know of that?"

"Everything, I should think," answered Aylmer calmly.

"And you told Bronsart — you told him that you knew?"

"I told him," she went on in the same tone, "that I had called him to my husband a thief, a common highwayman."

The strong old hands resting on the arms of the chair shook; a fierce light flamed for an instant in Forsythe's eyes. "You told him that, my daughter? — you told Christie Bronsart that?" It was impossible to suppress the passionate note of exaltation.

"Yes. That."

There was a long silence. Then Forsythe said in a voice that trembled: "Oh, it was cruel — it was cruel. It killed your mother. They ruined my life, and there was so much room for us both. Neither was taking a living from the other. But they had to have it all — all — even her life."

Aylmer's face paled. "How I hate it!" she said as if to herself.

"Hate what?"

"The name — the very name of Bronsart."

Her father looked at her in consternation. "But it is your name."

"Oh, no, no! I am called that, but my name is Forsythe — Forsythe. How I love it! How I love the

blood" — she pushed back her sleeve — "the blood which flows in my veins, good, clear, honest blood."

"Aylmer!" A terror of this mystery of inherited hate overwhelmed Forsythe. How happened it, here in this child of his, before whom, even in those far-off years when the passion and bitterness of defeat were yet raw in his heart, he had never suffered the mention of his great wrong? "You must not talk like that, Aylmer," he said weakly.

But the great deeps were in the storm. "I? — a Bronsart?" She held herself high. "No, never! Don't you know — don't you know, dad, that I'm not the stuff of which Bronsarts are made?"

And then in misery, despair, at the sound upon her lips of such bitterness against what was dearest to her in life, the helpless tears came again.

Forsythe had often heard men boast, as though they considered that they had peculiar cause for pride in such knowledge, that they knew women — meaning invariably thereby that they knew what a poor lot they were. For himself, he was quite conscious that he knew very little about women, for he had experienced but his wife, and he remembered her from those distant days of his strong, successful, arbitrary young manhood, a marvel of womanly tenderness, unselfishness, unquestioning devotion.

But had she always been that in the silence when her soul spoke truth to itself? Had she ever known moments of doubt, of alienation, of revolt?

For this was her daughter!

He knew no little foolish, comforting ways — he sat

beside his child, silent, in depths of perplexity, and longed as he had never longed since her death, for the mother who would surely have found a way for them all out of this great tangle. And Aylmer felt that if she could but have sobbed out her hurts on his strong shoulder, she might have found a moment's balm for this cruel, constant ache.

"My dear, let us have a few words of prayer together," said Forsythe at length. "It was the only path to peace — some day the child would find it so."

But Aylmer's soul was in storm. Prayer now? — when she was in such stress? She felt contempt for the weakness which sought such easy soothing.

She sat long musing after her father was gone, and again and again in the twilight darkness which she loved, she repeated to herself: —

> "To be Thyself is thyself to slay;
> Or, lest thou follow not what I say,
> Let being thyself be thus expressed:
> 'Tis to wear God's thought of thee as thy crest."

Was she seeking to do that? Was she?

She thought long and narrowly.

For in spite of all that she had said to her father, she had that rare pride of temper which courts defeat for its own point of view, if it can be but convincingly achieved.

The next morning as she was shopping in town, she went into the jeweller's with her watch which needed some slight repair. The man who waited upon her was effusive in attention, and as she turned to go, he haz-

arded: "Excuse me, Mrs. Bronsart, but I should like to know if the bracelet pleased you. Mr. Bronsart was so particular to have what he thought you would like."

"The bracelet?" For an instant Aylmer looked at the clerk with baffled eyes. Then she rallied proudly. "Oh, yes, yes. It was very pretty. Good-morning."

The carriage was waiting for her at the further corner, and as she walked up the street towards it, feeling curiously dazed — piteously uncertain of the next step — she came face to face with her husband and Erica Rymal. She bowed — she thought she even smiled. Why, she must — she must. One did not cry aloud in the street, because one's heart felt like — like this!

Beside the carriage she found Christie Bronsart waiting for her. "Well, my dear," he said kindly, "I was passing and saw the carriage and asked Montgomery where you were, and thought I'd wait a minute to have a word with you. Who let you out such a cold morning as this?"

He had seen his son and Erica pass, and knew that she had met them; he was not deceived by her smile.

"You go home quick, like a good girl," he added lightly. "I don't like you out in weather as rough as this."

Then he shut the door and was gone; he saw that she could not bear another word.

But after a moment or two alone, she sat straight again, her face suddenly calm. Ah, all these things

must wait, now. The day of reckoning was her due; it would come.

She looked steadily out of the window, seeking to feel herself calm and interested in the world without; as the carriage turned a corner her attention was caught by the figures of a man and a girl standing back from the street, close into the wall of one of the big buildings, as if courting shelter from the wind while they talked. No — she was not mistaken — she knew no other girl with such distinctive grace of line.

Instantly she stopped the carriage and stepped out. "Just a moment, Montgomery." But she paused, her hand still on the door. She felt such weakness — such palpitating fear of the strange wickedness of life. She had made this girl's struggle her own, but what was the good of the battle? And why should she fight it for another, with certain defeat in sight? She was sick of it all.

But a moment more, and resolute as ever, she crossed the street.

"Lucy," she said gently, as she touched the girl's arm — "Lucy, I am waiting for you."

Kent had seen her coming, and had immediately assumed a casual air; now, with a polite lifting of his hat, he went on his easy way.

Once safe again with her charge beside her in the carriage, Aylmer leaned back for a few moments with her eyes closed. Then she drew near to the girl, who drooped as far away from her as possible.

"Lucy, my child, what am I to do with you?"

Miserable tears filled Lucy's eyes. "I don't know," she said brokenly, "I don't know."

"When have you seen him before?"

"Oh, not since I told you I wouldn't. I haven't — I haven't. And this time I met him — I didn't try to see him. Oh, yes, I did — I did — I knew he would have to come this way to his lunch. And now it's all begun again — the ache, and the longing — Oh, don't you know — "

Aylmer took the girl's hands tightly in hers, the misery of her own sorrows for the time blotted out.

"You see, now, I'm all afraid again." There was the horror of despair in the young eyes. "Because — because I shall go back to him. I shall — I know it. I can't keep away. And what can you do — what *can* you do to keep me away from him?"

"What can we do?" repeated Aylmer. "Child, this will be a great time for us to find out."

For now the courage of a vast anger possessed her. Was this child, one of the fairest of things created, to be sacrificed as mere moth to this flame?

Not while love, and pity, and patience were hers to serve another's desperate need.

The power of the man! — generations of women behind this girl had felt it and been slaves to it, because it was their "duty" as wives and daughters to be so. And now came this daughter of a long line of women cursed with the inheritance of weakened will, with no weapon save that of fear to face the fight.

They sat through the long afternoon together, busy with dainty needlework, at which Lucy had proved

herself clever. But Aylmer noticed that the girl's eyes were ever wandering to the window — the pretty room was to her a prison. And at last with a passionate exclamation she jumped up. "I can't sit still any longer," she said wildly, "I want to go out. I must. I must see him again. I can't bear it. You don't know anything about it.' "

"Lucy, Lucy!" entreated Aylmer.

"Just let me go — such a little while. There's a place where I can watch him — when he leaves the office — he won't see me. I just want to look at him."

"No, no, Lucy. No. Remember all that it was before."

"All that it was before? It was heaven."

"Heaven on Mark Street, Lucy?" asked Aylmer sadly. "And you know that what went before took you there."

"I know — I know." The girl's eyes streamed with tears. "That was hell — hell. I said to him this morning that I wondered he would speak to me."

"Lucy — you said that? Oh, child, child!"

"But he said he didn't care — that he loved me in spite of it, and that he knew I was straight now."

Aylmer could have wept. For as she looked at Lucy, she realized that the girl's innate sweetness and charm were more evident to the beholder than ever before — the quiet life, the freedom from excitement, from fear and humiliation had restored to her the freshness and youth that for a time she had lost, to which there was added now a subtle fascination, the

deadly fragrance of experiences which yield but poisoned bloom.

And the man Kent — Aylmer felt suddenly faint — had been conscious that morning of all this, and because she was again so fair a flower for destruction, "forgave" her!

The hour passed while Aylmer exhausted argument and entreaty, though she knew that at times Lucy hardly listened to her. For in truth the girl's ears were open now but to the cry which had slipped from her lover's lips as he turned from her that morning: "Sweetheart, you know that I'll be waiting for you — you *know* that I'll be waiting for you."

Yet at length, because of her very weakness from the struggle, Lucy submitted. She took up her work again, and for the time, at least, Aylmer was sure that she was safe.

Then wearied to the point of collapse herself, she was summoned to receive Mrs. Bronsart.

"My dear Aylmer, now I know you've been moping, haven't you? Well, who can wonder at that, I'm sure! I know that you quite agree with me, that it's a most unpleasant — a most unnecessary way of — well, you know what I mean, dear. I always did tell Mr. Bronsart that."

"Yes, but there seems very little choice as to ways," remarked Aylmer.

"That's just it, my dear. You're always so quick to catch one's meaning. Now, Vonviette — Oh, Vonviette, my dear, is so different, and not becoming otherwise. In fact, she's not in the least the domestic treas-

ure that the devoted motherhood she has known has every reason to demand. Of course, I can't always expect to remain as young as I am now — it wouldn't be reasonable, would it, dear Aylmer, though how I shall ever look the part of a really middle-aged woman I can't imagine, can you? But that doesn't in the least matter, does it? — Oh, nothing does that concerns me — I am coming more and more to comprehend that, though I am afraid, dreadfully afraid, from what I hear, dear — but there! we won't say anything about that, will we? — you poor dear! But Bronsart men, my dear!" — the gesture of this wife of one of them implied that she had known scores of them intimately, and felt equal scorn for them all — "Bronsart men! well, I'm thankful at least I was never the mother of one of them, not that I would seem to suggest, dear Aylmer, that it will be any disgrace to you — Oh, no! You see that is one of the ways of Providence that we have to put up with as yet — and I daresay Christian will be immensely proud, you know — and as for my husband — really, he's so fond of you — I never understand that, because you're not in the least alike are you? — well, of course it will annoy him undoubtedly to be a grandfather at first — I've always noticed that about men — but I'm sure he will forgive you in time, dear."

Aylmer began to laugh — perhaps as an inevitable reaction from the day's sorrow; indeed, she felt hysterical.

"There now! that's how I like to see you," said Mrs. Bronsart approvingly. "I often say to Von-

viette that it's a pleasure to talk to you — you appreciate one so. And so few people do appreciate each other as they should. There's Mr. Boothroyd — my dear, he has been a bitter disappointment to me."

"Mr. Boothroyd? Why, I thought you were devoted to him."

"My dear, I was. I put it to you candidly — could I have been more so? But now I can hardly bear to think of my devotion to him without tears. It was the most charming thing. But he has quenched it — utterly quenched it, I might say without exaggeration."

"But how? That sounds so ruthless," Aylmer barely managed to say.

"Ruthless! My dear! But we won't talk about him. It is quite too recent a grief to discuss. It's a sad example of the idol thrown from the altar. Most unpleasant."

"Why, yes, for the idol."

"My dear, not at all. That is the very bone of my bitterness. The idol stalks abroad regardless — would much rather not be on an altar, thank you! But we were talking about Vonviette, I think, my dear Aylmer. I really feel greatly disturbed about her. I'm growing so afraid that what I've always suspected is really true — I fear that my sweet Vonviette is as like that cantankerous old grandmother of hers as two peas. A man ought really to be so — so careful of — of — "

"Of his grandmothers," suggested Aylmer.

Mrs. Bronsart laughed gaily. "Dear, you are so

witty. Yes, yes. That's the very idea I was groping after. It's really the most unwise thing to get the wrong kind of grandmother in a family. Because there's no possible way of ever getting her out again. Now, no one need tell me that that Von Viet woman was not a hawk — a veritable hawk. And you can see that characteristics like that are very uncomfortable to have to keep handing on to innocent children whether you wish to or not. You may be sure that dreadful old person will get in her licks every time in the family make-up — my dear, I consider that a most repulsive phrase, and I never make use of such expressions unless I'm simply driven to them by the exigency of circumstances, and so I repeat that she will keep on getting in her licks in the family make-up until the end of time. She will always be a most objectionable feature. I look ahead, my dear, and I see plenty of kicks coming in our family history, and you can't persuade me that they won't all come from that most uncomfortable and most persistent old woman."

"What particularly objectionable feature in the family countenance do you attribute to her?" Aylmer.

"Oh, my dear, it's far too general to be classified. But at present in my poor Vonviette it's taking the form of piety, quite the most undesirable, I think."

"Piety? — in Vonviette!" exclaimed Aylmer.

"I don't wonder you're surprised, my dear. It's been a severe shock to me. I think I have said to you before, oh, quite emphatically, that I believe in religion for women — it gives a woman a charm that

she really can hardly get in any other way, but, of course, I mean religion rightly understood, and held properly in check. It's simply the most dangerous thing if you get too much of it — I know, because I've suffered tortures with my conscience and all that. You couldn't understand, dear — I don't ask that you should. But you can see plainly that this frenzy of Vonviette's comes straight from that old grandmother of hers — of course she was the kind that dissipates in piety — positively dissipates. I'm sure there's the Bible — Oh, I don't mean that I don't approve of it — I do. But still some of the stories in it — well, if rightly understood, we know that a French novel would be tame in comparison, and yet old tabbies like that just sat and pored over it by the hour, and thought themselves saints. That's rather like your dear father, too, isn't it? — and yet such a respectable man."

"My father?"

"Why yes, dear. He's quite a kind of concordance on a stand, I'm sure. I never see him without getting an impression of cherubim and seraphim, and tabernacles and burnt offerings, and all that sort of thing."

"Weren't we talking about Vonviette?" suggested Aylmer, somewhat pointedly.

"Well, my dear, that's what I've been trying to talk about," said Mrs. Bronsart plaintively. "You see it's Sister Mary Frances. You don't know her I think, but you really should. She was meant to grace a palace instead of those most unsightly garments and no hair I suppose, which seems a direct flying in the face of

Providence, doesn't it? when so many people simply have to be bald whether they wish to be or not. You see, Vonviette has been reading French with her — I protested from the very start, and said everything I could think of about Rome and the Inquisition and thumb-screws — really every time she went I wondered whether I should ever see my darling child again. Oh, Sister Mary Frances is quite the sweetest thing, but naturally a serpent at heart — how could she possibly be anything else? Well, I must really be going, dear. I feel so much better now that I have opened my heart with all its sorrows to you — crucifixes, and holy water, and all that you know, and I see that I have cheered you up so, too. You look like a different creature, but, of course, you must remember that at these most unpleasant times even the prettiest woman is apt to look plain, so what could you expect, dear? I daresay you'll be much improved in looks by and by. Oh, my dear, here comes that dreadful Mr. Boothroyd, I shall have to quite precipitate myself away."

"It seems so long since I've seen you," said Aylmer to the rector as she shook hands with him. "Do you know that it must be weeks?"

"Yes, I think I know that," he answered gravely. He looked tired and worn, yet in his eyes there was the glow that bespoke the hidden fire unconquerably aflame.

For some moments they sat silent, watching together the rise and fall of dream pictures in the open fire. Then Aylmer said tremulously: "You have had

such difficulties lately — I have heard. I suppose since Mr. Wardrope and — others — found out that you had worked in the shops — well, that made such a dreadful stir of course. I was here when Mr. Bronsart told my husband. I have never seen him so bitter. He said the shops were ceasing to be their own — that they were at the mercy of any salaried spy. I said to Christian afterwards: 'But why should you mind? If you are treating your employees justly what have you to fear?' He said: 'It is not a question of justice. We are treating them justly, but we are not giving them, and never shall, all that they demand. Our business would never stand it.'"

"It's the old argument," said Boothroyd. "It means the profits we demand for ourselves would never stand it."

"I know, I said that to Christian. But I don't argue matters like that with him any more. Oh, I'm so sick of it all. It seems to me that everything we have has come from robbing some one else. Yet my father, even my father, does not see this as I do."

"You should not expect him to. He belongs to another administration. Besides, he probably now interprets the Bronsart wealth as a sign of direct approval of him — of divine favour to him — through his daughter."

"And that wealth is piling up by such terrible means. I have been watching the growing agitation about the employment of child labour in the South. The Bronsarts are very heavily interested in cotton, I believe. I tried to speak of that to Christian, but you

see I never can discuss those things wisely and calmly. I called it accursed gain. Think of that! I told him that I knew that one of our men who has just come back from the South, admitted that children worked all night and from ten to fourteen hours a day in our mills. He said he supposed so — that no one regretted that kind of thing more than he did, but that he and the men in with him were the slaves of commercialism equally with those children. He said that I spoke as though capitalists were little gods, who could adjust things on an ideal basis if they only would. Since then I have said nothing more."

"Don't," said Boothroyd. "For a while adopt the ministry of silence. He knows what you think now, and he may be considering these conditions far more critically himself than he would at present allow you to suspect. Believe that. Have faith in him. It is always so easy, too, for us to fall into the error of thinking that the interests of the great truths we have at heart may be served by thrusting them upon people. We develop bitter opposition, and flatter ourselves that we are doing a great work. We have not yet begun to realize how to use the power of peace. You have a great opportunity to use that now. Because, you see, your husband knows that you have suffered — that you are not afraid to suffer for what you believe. By the way, how is Lucy?"

Aylmer told him the day's story. He sighed. "Yes. It is going to be a fight. And it will be a victory, but not yet perhaps. You must remember if failure comes again, that what you have done can never be lost. It

cannot. But perhaps you are never to see the reward of your labours. Perhaps that poor child has yet to win salvation through depths of sin greater than any she has yet known. But victory will come. Believe in it."

"What is the matter with you to-day?" asked Aylmer. "Something is going to happen. I know it. What is it?"

"Well, suppose something is going to happen? — what of it?" He spoke lightly. "Yes, it is true. I wanted to tell you first."

"You are going away then — I see," said Aylmer quietly. A desolating sense of loneliness to come fell upon her. And it had been such a hard day.

"You must wonder why I should choose to go away now, when there seems such need that I should stay. I am going because I do indeed believe in the ministry of peace. If I go away now every truth that I have preached in Weston will remain a witness in the hearts of those who have heard it. The sermons that I shall be preaching here long after I am gone will do more in the service of truth than all I have preached here yet. If I remain, I shall disrupt the church. I can do nothing else as things are. One may argue, of course, that that might be the best thing that could happen to it, but I cannot see it so. I cannot see that a disrupted church accomplishes enough of good to counterbalance the ill that is wrought. I shall go, but I shall leave the spirit of the truths I have preached behind me to do its great work. You will see. There will be a harvest and it will be from seed of my planting. But it is not for my garnering."

"I see," said Aylmer. "Yes, I think you are right." But her lip trembled.

And Boothroyd looked at her. He wanted to stamp her face forever on his memory, just as it was at this moment.

Love? — it seemed to him that no man had ever drunk deeper of its bitter sweetness than he, but he was not ashamed of that, for even as he looked upon her, he turned the key in the great lock upon all that his love might have meant to him and to her that was not of the bravest and best.

A few evenings later as Christian loitered for a restless moment in the library after dinner, Aylmer said to him: "Christian, I was in Shield's on Tuesday. And Mr. Pond asked me how I liked my bracelet." She spoke in the quietest voice, but the effort was clearly appalling.

Christian sat silent; a slow red crept into his face.

"I haven't thought about much else ever since," continued Aylmer in the same still voice. "I have suffered so. And now I have to tell you that I know this, because somehow it seems to me only fair to you that you should know that I know. But it does not appear to me" — her voice shook helplessly — "that I can ever know a greater agony than the telling of this to you is to me."

Then without further word, she went away.

And Christian sat there, in the silence, a long time. The "cantankerous old person" to whom his stepmother so strongly objected had certainly ensured to her grandson an inheritance of obstinacy unsus-

pected in his easy youth, but proving itself now a dangerous quality of which to have such generous endowment.

Yet it was quite clear to him that he was behaving like a brute to his wife. How could he — Christian — possibly act so? But the next moment he was busy justifying himself.

To think that she knew of that bracelet! He realized that he had bought it in a moment of asinine munificence — which moment, as he shrewdly suspected now, had been carefully fostered by Erica, who regarded all men as objects of plunder.

And Aylmer knew of it! Why, of course, it meant nothing, but what must she think?

Erica Rymal? — he was beginning to hate her, with her sleek insidious ways. He was tired of being stroked so persistently the right way. And did she, perhaps — could she — actually think that he really cared for her?

But Aylmer — why had she forced him to such a pass as this? What had she done with his happiness?

She had put everything before him — her outrageous social theories — that girl — why, she was not willing to concede anything to his point of view.

His father? — ah, yes, that was all true enough in a way, but she should never have spoken of it to him.

Ah, but — Aylmer, Aylmer! His heart cried out for her, for the vanished joy of their early days together. What hideous thing was this, which had happened to them? How could she be so wilful — a woman cap-

able of such sweetness, such infinite appeal as Aylmer?

Oh, he must — he must go to her?

But what could he say?

For Aylmer was a proud woman. This wretched business of the bracelet would probably be difficult of explanation to her, because she herself would be so unreasonable.

Would he then wish her not to care?

Ah, had he not acted as he had, because he thought it was time for her to learn that a man's — a husband's — love had to be held— that it could not be lightly put on one side while she concerned herself with settling the ecónomic problems of the universe.

Her husband's love was a woman's first and greatest concern.

But oh, how sweet, how tormentingly sweet she could be when she wished!

Why, he must go to her — he must straighten out this miserable misunderstanding, and help her to see things in a clearer, more sensible light.

What rot! He was no fool — why, he was in no position to take the upper hand at the moment. He had acted like a — yes, but what made Aylmer go away like that? Why had she not stayed and, at least, given him a chance to defend himself. There were any number of explanations possible, but no! she walked off in that lofty, touch-me-if-you-dare manner, and expected him, no doubt, to run after her and beg her to come back.

He settled down in his chair again. This was not a moment to risk mistakes. All their future happiness depended on his coolness of judgment now.

He must think things out calmly, judicially.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE Church of the Ascension was crowded to the doors, and still in the chill April twilight a restless remnant of the throng within surged about the entrances.

"Wonder, after all, how the old guys will like it when they get the dull respectable times back again," observed one man to another. "Wardrope may kick all he likes, but he's never been so prominent in his life."

"Pretty poor way for a man to make a record," said the other gloomily. He belonged to that swarm of the unknowns who, according to Wardrope, had assailed with hobnailed boots "the dignity and sanctity of our church edifice." He was a common, prejudiced person, ignorant of the value to society of an uncontaminated "church edifice."

The lights burned low, mere points of blue against the dull grey walls; the dimness of coming night brooded black-winged among the arches where the faint notes of the organ fled as if for refuge from the multitude below. The wonderful west window, "sacred to the memory of one of the great among women, Hanna Von Viet Bronsart," was aflame as if the very

Sun of Righteousness were shining through it, revealing with striking effect in the uncertain light, the sombre brilliance of decoration, the richness of ecclesiastical blues and reds, the delicate embroidery of gold leaf, the intricate beauty of mosaic — the splendid simplicity of noble granite column, of finely sprung arch. Nothing was lacking in this House of God that architectural or artistic ingenuity could devise.

In the high belfry the chimes ceased suddenly their sweet medley; a single, silver-toned bell tolled quick monotonous note; then paused before it struck sharply the thrice repeated three swift strokes.

As the clear peal died within its echo, Aylmer walked slowly up the aisle to the Bronsart pew. She had not meant to come; at the last moment an uncontrollable impulse had mastered her.

The service, beloved of generations dead and gone, began. Like the edifice in which it was rendered, it lacked nothing in beauty of finish, perfection of detail. The organ had been built by a master of the craft; it had the celestial voicing rarely heard outside of a cathedral of the old world. And it was played upon by a man who knew nothing, felt nothing, lived nothing but notes — he was divinely music-mad.

Christian Bronsart attended church rarely in the evening, but the utterances of the rector were, of late, causing such widespread comment, and the tension between himself and the officials of the church was known to be so severe, that he was not the only man of his sort who found himself acutely interested in the

possible developments of the situation. Close as he was to his father, Christian was quite unable to diagnose just how direct was that clever schemer's responsibility for the state of tumult at present existing in the Church of the Ascension. Wardrope, big dough-headed man of millions, had been his catspaw in so many enterprises, that he undoubtedly was so in this — the determined effort, as yet carefully masked, to remove Boothroyd from his position, not so much because of what he had done, as because of what it was feared he would do. And the fact that Bronsart was saying so little while Wardrope was doing so much, was conclusive evidence to Christian, that the master hand was mixing the dough. He had tried to decoy his father into some expression of opinion on the present situation, but Christie Bronsart believed in a conspiracy of one — not even to his son did he often reveal himself.

"Wardrope? — Oh, well, you know Wardrope," said Christie smoothly. "He's all worked up, you see — says Boothroyd's a heretic — doesn't preach 'the Word' — better look out if you're a heretical party, and somebody gets after you with what he calls 'the Word.'"

"But that was the very point Wardrope made about Boothroyd before he came — said he preached the 'pure Gospel' — don't you remember?"

"Yes, but that was a good while ago. Why, I told Wardrope myself yesterday that as far as I could make out Boothroyd was preaching the Gospel straight, and that we'd have to let our houses, and

stocks and bonds, and all the rest go pretty soon now. Wardrope about had a fit — I wish you could have seen him. Why, I argued with him that, as far as I could see, the fellow had been a great success — he packs the place, and sticks right to his text just as he said he would when he came."

"Yet his preaching — Oh, you know it's directly antagonistic to — to us."

"Oh, yes — yes, undoubtedly," said Bronsart lightly. "But I don't see that he can help that, you know. I said to Wardrope that the crying need of the hour was a revised version of the Bible from a capitalistic point of view. But as long as we give our preachers a socialistic text-book of the rankest type and say: 'Now you stick to that,' there's bound to be doings, if we expect them to show that it upholds the divine rights of kings and corporations. The thing to do if you want a quiet life and most of the cash, as I said to Wardrope, is to encourage the parson to preach on Browning, or the world's ten best pictures, or the effect of the climate on the weather — something of that sort." And Bronsart smiled blandly at Christian. Then, with a quick change of tone, he added: "How's Aylmer?"

"Oh, very well, I think."

Bronsart looked steadily at his son. "Christian, you're a damn fool! But I believe I've mentioned that before."

Yes, no one knew that as completely as Christian himself. Even now his mind was busy with the thought as he looked furtively at his wife in the pew, beside

him, yet in reality as remote as if his life had never touched hers.

From her presence here this evening he inferred that she knew that a crisis in the affairs of the church was at hand. Yet it seemed unlikely that the opposition to Boothroyd should be able to accomplish anything definite or immediate, in the face of such popularity as this vast congregation attested.

"Oh, it's a flurry — it'll quiet down, and after a bit he'll become as prosaic as the rest of the preachers."

Would he? Well no, perhaps not. The fellow believed things, or had persuaded himself that he did; like Aylmer, he was possessed of the vicious determination to put into practice some very interesting theories for which other people might pay the price.

At the end of the pew sat Vonviette — a marvel of clothes, complexion, and apparent indifference. She gave to the most casual beholder the impression that she considered herself at a show which bored her.

Luther's hymn — magnificent tribute to a faith which, in this age or that, finds ever triumphant expression of the hope unquenchable in the human heart — rose as were it one-voiced from the great congregation. It rose to the tune, mighty of chord, in which men of the long ago, strong for the agony of death, had lifted it for the last time upon lips which knew no language of recant.

"A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing:"

A deep flush of colour swept Aylmer's face; she closed her hymnal, and stood as one who listens, her hands tightly clasped. A passionate eagerness possessed her to experience to the uttermost the emotion of an hour which, she divined, was to entitle itself to supreme distinction in her memory.

"Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth is his name,
From age to age the same,
And he must win the battle."

Vonviette stood silent, too — little, flippant, Dresden china Vonviette — it would never have occurred to the onlooker that she could feel the mighty throbs of this great cry of the soul.

"Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill;
God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is for ever."

The thundering chords descended to the key-note with a solemn majesty that shook the heart. The coarsest of flesh, the slowest of blood felt it, and was vaguely disquieted.

The sunset no longer flamed through the great rose window in the west; yet still the lights burned low against the grey walls; the only spot of brilliance in the gloom was the pulpit, within which the rector stood, facing his people, leaning forward, his chin

upon his hand, unconsciously studying them as it seemed, in that curious unconventional way which had so often irritated the formal souls of the elect.

"'Tisn't fitting in a church like ours to have a man monkeying around in the pulpit like that — a pulpit carved in Florence," Wardrope complained to Bronsart.

"Well, 'tis a pity, isn't it," mused Bronsart, "that we've got to have a minister that's just a human being, instead of some sort of contraption designed and made to order for us to match the rest of the fittings."

Still Boothroyd paused. He was waiting until he felt these people gathered close to him; until the sight of this face here, of that one there, had eased from his heart all remnant of the bitterness which had lingered in it when he stepped to his place.

Then, for the moment, he saw nothing; his vision was blurred by the intensity of the prayer which swept him out towards them upon a mighty tide of tenderness: "To-night, O God, O my Father, let me know nothing but love, nothing but love."

And there, in the very instant of entreaty, he was conscious of a power as of Pentecost descending upon him. He straightened; threw back his head, and began:

"My beloved: Far away in one of the galleries of the Old World, there hangs a picture representing a young king on his way in procession from his coronation, panoplied in all the pomp and power and proud circumstance that this earth can bestow. He

makes his way through his acclamatory people upon a white horse, burdened with the purple and gold of princely appanage, while the loveliest maidens in the kingdom strew rose-leaves in his path. And from the flower-festooned balconies where beauty sits, the rain of blossoms ever falls, sweetening the air that he breathes.

"Behind him a long line of warriors stretches grim — steel of feature as of armour — proud supporters of this king in whose veins flows the crowned blood for which their forefathers died on many a sodden field. Strong of arm, they hold the kingdom for the king, and are superbly conscious of their power. The God they serve with such arrogance — the only God they know — is that marvellous fiction of the human mind which has held three-quarters of the world in thrall since time emerged from darkness — the Divine Right of Kings, a doctrine which worked as most doctrines do — mightily for the Few against the Many.

"Thus the young king comes from coronation, where every device, every subtlety of solemn vow, of plighted service, has been used to heighten within himself and within his people, the consciousness of his aloofness, of the supremacy of regal uplift, of the unapproachable majesty of the Crown. But — " Boothroyd paused — "the procession passes ; banners float; spears glitter gay in the sun; the long line of helmets follows the lonely figure in proud subservience — and ever the rose-leaves fall, a tinted shower upon the dusty way.

"But the king — the king — he has turned his head, and there, by the common roadside he has seen the vision.

"What is it? —

"Only the rudely carved figure of the crucified Christ, upon rough cross there at the street corner, as we have all seen it in our foreign wanderings. Just the Christ, with the crown of thorns upon his dying head. The procession passes."

How still the great congregation! — even Wardrope never moved his eyes from the tall, young figure upon which the brilliance of the only light in the church turned full, was blazing.

"But the king — the king! Sometime, when you see the picture, beloved, study the wonderful blue eyes in that boy's face — but alas! some there are who see them, and never know their meaning — study the pain, the fear, the repudiation in them, and remember! — " Boothroyd leaned far out over the pulpit — "the vision never comes to us without pain, without fear, and without our bitter repudiation of it.

"The procession passes; but another king is at its head; he wears the crown of a great state, but he has weighed it in the balances with a crown of common thorns and has found it wanting. His eyes have been opened — he has seen. Henceforward, life is not to be for him along a rose-leaf path. Life for him will be full of unrest, of disquiet, for his face is the face of one destined to greatness — he is not to take life less than nobly.

"He is a king, but his title has acquired to him new

meaning. He is a king — that he may serve the least of his subjects. He is a king that he may lay his crown humbly at the feet of that majestic ideal which knows no victory save that of sacrifice, no peace save in renunciation, no triumph but that which crowns defeat on Calvary.

"Renunciation — Oh, my beloved, I wish that I might write that word in letters of fire upon your hearts. Why? Because to-day society is sick unto death of the 'strife for things desired.' Yet can we call that strife in some of its manifestations ignoble? Shall the man at the plough, the mechanic beside the steel hammer, the engineer at the throttle, alone feel nought of the mighty movements of our age? My friends, would you think it *wise* to leave him behind in the great race if you could? Shall he say: 'Let be, let be — the higher education, the greater comfort, the broader living, the quickened imagination — let be, let be — these are for another and his children, not for me and mine.'

"My friends, he is not saying this, and he will not. He is human, as are you, who hunger and thirst, not after righteousness, but — after a steam yacht, mayhap, because your neighbour has one.

"There are honest souls who speak darkly of the materialization of our age, who say that we are putting things in the place of God. How can we? For what is God? Who shall define, who shall limit Him? Do not you think that the Great Mind is within every new marvel of invention — within every struggle of

the scientist to evoke the order of law from the chaos of ignorance?

"Two hundred years ago our forefathers worshipped in fear the Power that cast helpless infants into hell — to-day we set a little child in the midst, and seek to learn from our own tenderness towards it some of the precious secrets of the Eternal Love. We no longer worship crude brute power as our fathers did — the steel hammer and the modern forge have cast into the shade the little devil, with his cheap red fire ablaze upon human flesh.

"There are others who describe our time as a period of transition — sadly uncomfortable, but to be endured as well as may be. They appear to infer that humanity sailed out of a peaceful haven about fifty years ago into an unexpectedly troubled sea, but that just around the corner of the next few years or so, peace and a contented lower class await our tempest-tormented craft.

"My people, there has never yet been an age which was not one of transition. There has never yet been an age which was not uncomfortable for some one. Some of us have merely become aware of this unpleasant condition of things, because it is being forced upon us that the ease which we consider our right, is being questioned by some as unearned privilege.

"This fiction of the transitional age is a vicious one — the people who believe in it are apt to feel sorry for themselves and their discomforts, but they argue that the misfit period will soon pass, and everything be happy as before. So, with folded

hands, they sit back and wait to see the good times happen.

"Good times, beloved — and by good times those of you who know me, know that I do not mean the good times of these careless folk — good times will never happen to the next age, unless you and I put our shoulders mightily to the wheel and push our present problems higher up the hill of human progress where the light is clearer than down here in the valley. The age ahead will have its own problems, but we in this can insure that those problems shall be of a loftier, more spiritual type than ours."

Again Boothroyd paused; then, in a lower tone, he added: "To the wheel, beloved, to the wheel!"

There in the dimness about him, he felt his congregation so near, so inexpressibly precious to him; the rapport between speaker and hearer was complete.

"Then there are those who believe that religion, the faith of our fathers is dying in our midst. Unquestionably, a great many of the *faiths*, of the *superstitions* of our fathers, are dying out among us. And they are dying none too soon.

"In my ministry among you I have said little of the question of modern criticism. But what many of you understand as modern criticism is not modern. There has never been a creed without its critic, a faith without its Thomas, and for that let us thank God, who has thus sought to safeguard the freedom of man's spirit. And let the church, which stands for truth, render due honour to those who have done so great a work in the destruction of untruth, often at such cost

to themselves — or what seemed such cost — in reality, all joy, beloved, all joy when the day of reckoning comes, for the crown of thorns is to all ages the crown of achievement.

"But I have said little to you about all this — why? Because I believe so much, that I have no time to dwell upon the things that we do not and cannot believe. O God — " with uplifted face, his arm high outstretched as if he sought to lay hold of the Unseen — "O God, give me time — life is so short — give me time to make Thy message known — to fill with beauty the waste places of human hearts."

Again a moment he waited.

"I believe so much. I believe in the Fatherhood of God. I believe in the brotherhood of man. I believe in the divinity of God incarnate in all His children. I believe in the inexhaustible power of Love — the love which gives its only begotten, if need be, and there is always need. I believe in the Crown of Thorns, in the way of the Cross, in the sacrifice upon Calvary.

"I believe in the existence of a peace which this world cannot give and cannot take away.

"I believe in the persistence of good, and the final triumph upon *this earth* of righteousness.

"O God, how much I believe!

"I said to you just now that our age is sick from 'the strife for things desired.' But there is no escape from that strife for us. The corporation which owns our light, our water, our heat, our steel highways is governed by it as well as the mistress of the little household with its one servant. But there are a few of us who are

governed by that strife to an extent that imperils the welfare — nay more — that threatens the existence of many others of us. And that will not do in these days, my brethren. For we have travelled far from those easy days of capitalistic control when a strike was followed by the hanging of six thousand Roman labourers. We are entering upon the day of the under dog, thank God! There are those of us who fear the dawning of that day — who are making desperate efforts to set its sun back in the heavens. That has been tried many times — it has never been accomplished. My friends, we must learn to live not only in our age, but with it. The shores of human history are strewn with the wrecks of those who sought to turn the stream by rowing against it. That cannot be done. It were well to learn the lesson without the shattering of the ship.

"It is the dawning of the day of the under dog, but to understand all that this is going to mean, to accept our share in it, is going to make mighty demand upon some of us. It is not easy when dividends suffer, from the passage of laws regulating child labour, from disabled employees and eight-hour acts, for men to welcome such legislation. But that is what we are going to be called upon to do. We are called upon to hail with joy the dawning of the great day when a man shall be worth more than a dollar, when we shall protect his little child from our own greed with all the rigidity of the severest laws that we can frame.

"Perhaps we shall be called on for more than this. Perhaps this dawning of the day of the under dog

means for some of us the coming of that time when we shall consecrate not a part, but all of our gift for money-getting to the service of our fellows, because like the young king in the picture, we shall have seen that which eye never sees, nor ear hears, nor the imagination of man conceives.

"Not so long ago there died in this country, a man of whom it was said by those who knew, that had he chosen to devote himself to the commercial life, he could have made most of the money west of the Alleghanies. Now that man knew better than any of his observers, how vast were his powers, and all that they might gain for him. But he did not use them in making most of the money west of the Alleghanies. Why?

"Because he, too, had seen the vision. And his memorial tablet says of him: *The whole city was his parish, and every soul needing him a parishioner.* He is dead, but the soul of him lives on, immortal in his fellows.

"Perhaps, beloved, there is to come to some of us, to God's priceless few, this great call to poverty. There is no call so needed in our day.

"Poverty! — that joy which vows itself to know hunger with those who hunger — pain with those who suffer — sorrow with those who mourn — tears with those who sin.

"This call to poverty? — it is a strange call in such a place as this where wealth worships in so costly a temple. It is out of place — it offends the ears of many of you. My friends, I understand that, and because I believe that no man with a message need struggle for

a place in which to deliver it, I am speaking to you tonight for the last time."

The stir in the congregation was so instant — the wave of feeling ran so high, that Boothroyd was constrained to wait until it should subside. The tumult of his own emotion for the moment matched that of his people, but the flame of his dark eyes alone betrayed him.

"Damn!" said Christie Bronsart under his breath — "Damn!" He had slipped into a seat at the rear of the church just as the sermon began. Then he smiled his cool little smile. Well, this was stealing Wardrope's thunder with a vengeance.

"There are some high souls," continued Boothroyd in calmest tone, "who make such struggle to be in tune with the Infinite, that they overlook altogether the duty of being in tune with the Finite. But I believe in the ministry of peace, and I agree with those of you who think I have no business in this pulpit. I have none. That ideal, that Christ to whom this church is dedicated, is not my Christ, my ideal. When I came here, I was told that I was expected to preach the Gospel. I understood that to mean the Gospel of that Christ whose life is told between the covers of this book. Have I preached that — have I?"

He waited as if for answer — the silence seemed to thunder it back to him.

"Ah, in that last great day of reckoning, when life faces death, when the end of all the fever and the fret, the passion and the pain of my breathing's brief space is upon me — O God, in that great reckoning, grant

that some of these here to-night may bear witness for me before Thy throne, that the Gospel I preached in this pulpit was indeed the truth, the word that becomes life."

"Damn!" said Christie Bronsart again, "Damn!"

"So I stand here, beloved, for the last time. You will be here again, and for many Sabbaths yet to come but my place will know me no more. And so I would leave with you — with you who have heard the call, my text, to remain in my memory and yours, an imperishable link between us.

"'*Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate.*'

"Separate? — Separate! — beloved, is that a word for love to use? Ay, ay. Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate — separated from self-seeking, from wanton luxury, from the lust of gain at another's cost — separate that you may serve, that you may save. And for the last time, I uplift before you to night, no dead and gone theology — I make demand upon you for that righteousness old as the soul of man, and as imperishable.

"Here in our midst, at this moment, the Christ stands, with the wounds of humanity upon him and pleads: Soul of man, wouldst thou see Paradise with me when the night of life is past?"

The voice sank almost to a whisper.

"Ay, Lord, ay. We would see Paradise with Thee. But how, but how?

"The procession passes. And there, lifted high, that all may see, if they will, Eternal Love hangs

crowned upon the cross of sacrifice, the cross of joy. "*Beloved, have you seen the vision?*"

The great congregation dispersed upon steps that were hushed; the heavenly singing of the choir was stilled; the last faint note of the organ sank upon the silence, and still Aylmer sat, as she had sat through the sermon, unstirred. At the far end of the pew Vonviette waited, her little foot tapping the hassock impatiently.

Christian stood, restless, uncertain. He was in an agony of apprehension about his wife.

"Aylmer!" he said gently.

She lifted her white face to him.

"Take me home, Christian — take me home," she said with lips which hardly moved.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

AYLMER lay calm, in such soft content. It was so still, so heavenly still. There had been a great storm in the night, but that was long past. Now all was peace, such utter peace.

She closed her eyes again.

Ah, Hillman was whistling beneath her window. No, he stopped suddenly. She liked to hear Hillman whistle — it was such a merry, boyish sound. And Hillman wasn't any longer young. That was the charm of it.

"I wonder how John's crocuses are coming on," she mused dreamily. "I must get over there to-day. Why, I haven't been there for a week — John will be hurt."

That dreadful storm — she had slept so badly. The night had seemed an unending agony.

What lovely Easter lilies there on her table! But surely — had they been there the night before when she went to bed? How was that? Who had been in her room so early this morning?

How beautiful they were. They made her think of Stroud again. With such pride he had showed her a great pot just like these, and said he

meant to have them ready for her on Easter Sunday.

Yes, perhaps they would be, for Easter was late this year.

"Why, Sincerity — Sincerity!" she said suddenly in gentle astonishment. But her voice was so ghostly faint — it made her almost smile. And even smiling seemed too great an effort — she was so lazy this morning. But what was Sincerity doing there by the window, sewing, just as if she had been there forever?

In the instant Sincerity was beside her. "My lamb," she said in strong but tenderest tone. "My lamb, did you want anything?"

"Why, no, no." How could Sincerity think she might want anything? Was it not enough to lie there half dreaming, such happy dreams?

After that she was still again for a long time, sometimes sleeping, sometimes awake, but always watched by Sincerity.

At last she stirred. "Sincerity, bring me — you know — the little things" — her voice was entreatingly sweet — "the ones we laid out to be used first."

"Oh, not now, my lamb, not now. Better wait a while."

"No, now, now," exclaimed Aylmer with pathetic imperiousness. "I cannot wait. I'm just aching to look at them. It won't be long now before we really want them, will it? You see — I think, perhaps, I'm a bit ill to-day." She had a proud little air as if imparting a secret quite unsuspected by Sincerity. "Quick, Sin dear, I really must see them."

"What a funny old Sin!" she thought affectionately. "I suppose she's frightened because I think I feel ill. But I'm not afraid. Aren't my hands thin, though. I never noticed that before."

But she smiled, and lay still in a rapture of expectancy. Pain? — Yes, but what would that matter — afterwards!

With returning consciousness she had grasped but one strand of the tangled skein she had so nearly dropped — the last strand to which she had clung so desperately as the darkness of agony engulfed her.

Who was whispering in her dressing-room? "You must tell her — no one else can."

What did that mean?

At last Sincerity came back, slowly enough it seemed to her impatience, bearing a dainty, lace-trimmed basket. She sat down beside the bed and lifted the cover with hands that shook.

"What is the matter? Aren't you well, Sin dear?"

"No, dear lamb, I'm not," said Sincerity helplessly.

"Poor old Sin!" Aylmer stretched out her white hand and tenderly patted the rough ones, vaguely groping among the dainty bits of garments. "If it's that dreadful old pain again, Sin, we must see Dr. Day about it."

Dr. Day! a spasm of pain crossed her face. Dr. Day! The mention of his name was like the meeting of her teeth upon grit, and with an instinctive desire for escape from a thought in some inexplicable way full of distress, she turned to the basket.

"But they are not here, Sincerity — the ones we laid out specially, I mean. Where are they? Who has pulled the basket all about?"

Her voice sank to a whisper, as strange fear laid hold upon her heart.

"Tell me, Sin. What is it? What has happened? Why are you crying so?" Her eyes were wide with the appeal of a frightened, uncomprehending child. "Oh, Sin, I feel so strange," she added with a sob. "What has happened to me? Oh, Sincerity, my baby, my baby! What have they done with my baby?"

Hours after, she still lay, again unconscious. It seemed that she had groped feebly back to the daylight of life, but to make bitter discovery of its cruelty to her.

And Christian sat again beside her, as he had sat through those terrible hours which had threatened to leave him forever alone. Every now and then during that long struggle his father had come up for a moment — just to lay a hand on the boy's shoulder, with the longing to show that his heart was wrung by the misery of it all. And yet this was what he had anticipated as the only thing likely to bring sight and sanity to Christian — to them both, indeed. But no, not such horror of agony, such deadly fear as this!

If the boy lost Aylmer, there would be a blot on his life that nothing would efface. He had gone through the anguished experience of bereavement himself, but he knew his nature for a lighter one than his son's; the obstinacy which in the one threatened the destruction of personal happiness, in the other had been used

only in that fight with the world where the possession of it counted for so much. "No, I don't believe I ever made the mistake of using my faults to promote my own discomfort," Christie Bronsart reflected dismally. "But it probably takes an artist in the study of human nature — his own — to do some of the things I've done. Christian takes himself so blamed seriously — so does she, poor child. It takes a wise man to understand that the other fellow's point of view is infinitely more important to the wise man than his, however wise, is to the other fellow. I've spent my life finding out the other fellow's point of view and utilizing him and it for my own benefit. But these two poor children — And Forsythe, another of the same brand! Poor Forsythe! I don't know which it's hardest on just now, him or Christian."

The silent, suffering father had paced the street all night — the last night of the long struggle, his eyes always on the windows where the lights burned brightest. And when, in the early morning, they had called him in to look on the face of the little dead child — his grandson — and his enemy's — he had turned fiercely upon Bronsart and had said:

"What misery has your son wrought in my little girl's heart that has brought such calamity as this to pass?"

And Christian had heard the father's cry; it repeated itself over and over again in his dulled brain as he looked at his wife's still face upon the pillow. What misery had he not wrought in her heart in those few days after she had spoken to him about the brace-

let! — when she must have waited — waited in vain for him to say something to her? To think that she had gone into that devastating agony with no supreme consciousness of his love for her to sustain her! Even believing, perhaps, that he had given his affection to another woman.

He, Christian, care for any other? He leaned over, and lifted her white hand to his lips, his heart bitten with pain for her. But he laid it down again. He was not worthy of that.

Ah, had he not seen her shrink from him in those agonizing moments of consciousness, when it seemed to him that he must speak to her, or weep like a woman? — her eyes had turned ever to Sincerity, of whose faithful affection she had never known doubt.

The love of the man for the woman — how she must have analysed it, and, at length, scorned it — this woman in whose high nature there was no dross to match dross.

If she lived — Ah, God! if she lived, how was he to win again all that he had so lightly lost?

The impulsiveness which lay side by side in his character with his obstinacy, flamed high; the pendulum was swinging mightily the other way. He would show her — he would serve for her seven years if need be — nay, seven more!

The loss of the child had affected him but slightly — it seemed such a minor happening. He was sorry in a vague, impersonal way — sorry for the child, he thought.

Ah, Aylmer, Aylmer! — how could he think of aught but her?

The hours so slow, the nights so long, moved on in spite of fears; days slipped slowly into weeks.

And then, to his amazement and grief, Christian found that time as it passed, and Aylmer's tenderly cherished recovery, were bringing him no nearer to her. She greeted him always in the same sweet, unsmiling way; the gulf that yawned between remained unspanned. It was not that she impressed resentment upon him; it simply seemed that something had died in her.

It was a gay saying of Christie Bronsart's that a wise man never went to bed at night without knowing where he could obtain a new wife in the morning if he happened to find that he required one, but when there had seemed every reason to suppose that his son would discover himself in this position, he had had no jocund advice with which to cheer him. He had a genuine affection for Aylmer, and his fist, moreover, was very decidedly against that sleek pussy, Erica Rymal. "She's such a very unprejudiced person," he reflected. "She would marry either me or my son — whichever of us happened to require a wife first. Christian's been an ass, and he's paid the price. If that's all there is to it, he's got off easily in my estimation."

He sighed, and was thankful he could feel lighthearted once more. It had been a hard fortnight for everyone concerned; he had had enough of watching and wakeful nights for a while — he had lived at

Christian's for nearly a week — and when he felt sure of his first undisturbed evening in his own den, with a peaceful cigar, he prepared to yield himself in laziest contentment to the luxury.

But he had hardly been alone twenty minutes when Vonviette came in.

"Papa Bronsart, I want to talk to you a little bit," she said, seating herself on the arm of his chair.

"All right, Kitten. What is it?" he answered tenderly. "You look tired. What have you been up to today?"

"Oh, thinking — thinking."

"Thinking!" he echoed with laughter. "Oh, Von, you musn't do that. You know you were never made to think."

"Well, whether I was or not, I'm forced to it now." She spoke without smiling.

"Girlie, what's the matter?"

"The matter?" She drew in her breath. "Oh, Papa Bronsart, Papa Bronsart, such a dreadful thing is the matter. And nobody but you can help me."

"Damn! It's some man, I'll be bound," thought Bronsart quickly. He felt as if a screw in him tightened suddenly; he had the father's unconscious, instinctive aversion to the man who would make a wife of his daughter. His little Vonviette! — what experiences the future might hold for her — experiences from which he shrank with the memories of the past two weeks still hot in his heart.

"Well, what is it?" he asked a trifle huskily.

"Oh, I wonder — I wonder how I can tell you, Papa Bronsart."

Yet she was calm; that further alarmed him. "I remember her just like that," he thought, "when she was a little baby, beginning to talk. She had jammed her bit of a finger in the door, and she held it up to me bleeding, and without any tears said so quietly: ''Ook, Papa Bwonsa't, 'ook.' And now something is hurting her just like that."

"What is it, Kitten, what is it?" He stroked her cheek softly; he had with her the femininely tender, caressing ways natural to him with all women — above all, with this beloved child, who had known so little of brooding motherhood.

"It's like this, Papa Bronsart. You've been so taken up lately with Christian and his troubles — you haven't thought much, have you? — of some of the things that are happening in this town" — there was a pause, then she added: "Mr. Boothroyd is here again, but he's going away for good on Thursday."

"Mr. Boothroyd!" He noticed instantly the dropping of the epithet "Father." And his heart stood still.

"Well, little one?" It was a very tender touch upon her cheek.

"Well, you see, Papa Bronsart" — she slipped down until her face lay close against his — she knew no fear of her father — "you see, I love him."

"The devil you do!" he exclaimed with an effort at lightness. For in his soul he was saying: "This is a damned mean turn of the wheel." But she must never suspect that he thought that. No, no!

"Well?" he said again. He smoothed the hair back from her forehead, and then he saw that her eyes were full of tears — she began to sob.

"Why, girlie, girlie!" he drew her close to him again. "What's the matter? Is it anything to cry about? Is it because you're afraid I — I — "

"Oh, papa dear, no, no! Haven't you always let me have anything I want?"

"Well, aren't you going to have this?" he demanded.

She slipped off his chair, and on to the footstool beside him, wiping away her tears with a bit of lace as costly as everything about her. And he watched her in silence. What had happened? What was interfering with the happiness of this child, dearer to him than anything else in life? What dared interfere with it?

She was calm again, but he was afraid of that. He liked it better when she cried with her face against his.

"You see, Papa Bronsart, I — I — love him, but — he doesn't love me."

"He doesn't love you," repeated Bronsart. "Oh, he doesn't, indeed!"

"Damn his impudence!" he exclaimed under his breath — "Well, I guess that can be got over, maybe."

Have the chance to love his daughter, and not do so! He would just like to meet the man capable of that.

"Ah, but that's it, Papa Bronsart. I'm not sure of that. Because — don't you suppose — don't you

suppose that when I wanted him to love me, I haven't — haven't — " she paused.

"Ah, so!" It was an exclamation of his mother's, slipping out of the long past; nothing could have betrayed equally the agitation growing in him from moment to moment.

"He has never once thought of loving me — the idea has never even occurred to him."

"Oh, it hasn't!" From a certain amazed indignation that the man should have presumed to aspire to his daughter's affection, Bronsart was passing into an equal state of amazement and indignation that he had not done so. "He hasn't, indeed!"

"No. And so, papa darling, you have got to do something for me. I have thought it all out. That's why I've been thinking all day. You are to go and tell him that I love him, and that he has got to love me." She looked at her father commandingly.

Bronsart sat back in his chair. "Vonviette, I — I — tell him — that!"

"You must. You see, there is nothing else to do, Papa Bronsart. Because I will have him. I must. Haven't I always had what I wanted? Haven't you always got for me everything that I asked for?"

"But Vonviette, my child — a man — "

"Papa dear, you mustn't argue with me. It won't do any good," she said patiently. Then her tone changed — she stood up. "Listen! I have never wanted anything in my life as I want this. I would throw away everything I ever had, or ever will have, to get it. If I can't have it, I shall never ask you for

anything again." She flashed a strange look at him. "Oh, I've always been so sick of having all that I wanted. Didn't you ever suspect that, Sonny?" — it was her pet name for him — of rare bestowing — nothing could have acted on him as it did now — "didn't you suspect it sometimes when you saw, when you must have seen, that I wasn't one bit grateful for something lovely that you gave me? — you see it meant nothing to you to give it to me, and nothing to me to take it."

It was true. There had never been a moment's self-sacrifice in the love he had felt for her — how could there have been?

"I've often looked at people who wanted things, and wondered what that would feel like. I've envied them so. Then I've tried giving them things to see if that made me happy. It didn't. I'm not like Aylmer. I was in her room the other day when Sincerity brought that man, Stroud, up to see her. I could tell that he just worshipped her. I wondered how in the world she could feel so interested in him. Aylmer loves people — any common old thing that breathes. I couldn't. They all bore me. But now — now!" — a bright spot flamed in her cheeks — her little hands shook. "Oh, Papa Bronsart, I want him. I want him. And you must get him for me. You must."

Bronsart could have laughed aloud — or wept — at this pathetic, this tragic result of her life-long training in having what she desired.

"Child," he said tenderly — so tenderly, "I am afraid that may be difficult."

"Difficult!" she stamped her foot. "Of course it will be difficult. What do I care?"

He was silent. At last he said: "Vonviette, I have been this man's enemy. I have made his way here impossible for him. He must know that."

"I daresay," she answered indifferently. "That would all count for nothing, if — if he began to love me. You will go to see him? You will talk to him?" She looked steadily, imperiously at her father.

"My child!" he exclaimed.

There was silence again until she said in the quiet tone that disturbed him so: "Sonny, don't you love me more than anything else in the whole world?"

"Guess I do, Vonviette." His lip quivered.

"Then get me what I want."

He felt the appalling cruelty of her demand upon him — but he put that thought resolutely aside. His child had come to a fearful pass to ask humiliation such as this of him — to be willing to accept it for herself.

Not for a moment did he seek to belittle this crisis — he understood his daughter too well. The brilliant intuition which had so often revealed to him his rivals' plans when they were but taking slow shape in their own minds, enabled him now to measure the possible results of this catastrophe with increasing apprehension.

"Just how shall I go about that, Von?" he asked quietly.

"You must go to see him at once."

"And tell him that you love him?"

She nodded — the tears were in her eyes again. "You see, papa, perhaps, when he thinks of that — don't you see? — I told him once that he cared only for the people who were in distress — who were suffering. You can tell him that I am."

"Oh, damn, damn!" said Bronsart, none the less forcibly because inaudibly.

"You see, when he thinks it all over," she pursued calmly, "it would mean me — many men have thought me not undesirable — and a great, a great deal of money, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, Von, don't you know, child, that he isn't that kind? Money? — why it means nothing to him — nothing."

"Oh, you never can tell," she retorted, unmoved.

He looked at her, so fair, so childish in her dainty littleness, and had a curious perception of his own unscrupulousness thus revealed to him in his daughter — she would bribe, buy, steal, what she wanted, — possess it at any price. How often he had felt, and said what she had just said—and proved it true—in the determined struggle to obtain what belonged to some other.

She would willingly know what she loved, less noble, less worthy — she would tempt it to be so, if she might thereby but possess.

No, no! She, his daughter, was not, as she had truly said, like Aylmer, who for no possible gain to herself would have courted degradation for another.

He had a moment of supreme bitterness. Then he

said gently: "My child, I don't think I can do what you ask."

"Don't you? Very well

He had feared an outburst; he feared this calm acquiescence more.

"Vonviette," he began pleadingly.

"Oh, don't make excuses," she said with a trace of weariness in her resolutely hardened voice — "it's all right. You do as you think best. I merely made up my mind that I would ask you to do this, so that — afterwards — I should not be tormented by the thought that there was something more I might have done. I hate regretting things. It's such a waste."

"Afterwards? — What do you mean, child?"

For a moment she considered; then she said arbitrarily: "Oh, you do what I've asked you to do, Papa Bronsart."

"See here, Vonviette" — he was suddenly rebellious — "you had better be frank with me. You demand that I shall do a thing that's quite impossible — a thing I would rather take a million or two out of my pocket than do — "

"Why, of course you would," she said tranquilly. "I quite understand how dreadful this is for you — it's frightful — I *understand*, but I don't care — I don't feel anything about it. I can't, you know, or I should never dream of letting you do such a thing. But the alternative — it's rather serious — you wouldn't like it, Sonny."

She stroked his hand, and she felt the pity for him —

the first sign she had shown of it — but there was no relenting in the look she gave him.

"Tell me, Vonviette," he pleaded.

"You see, the first point is, that I must have what I want, isn't it?"

He nodded, because she waited for an answer.

"But if I can't have it," she said in a low tone — "if I can't — if all that I am and all that you are — all that you have — won't get it for me — "

"Vonviette," he broke in sharply, "give it all up child. There isn't a man on earth worth such — such disturbance. Men are not at all what the women who love them, love to think they are. Boothroyd isn't either — any more than any other. A woman never understands that soon enough."

Her eyes flamed. "Don't you dare say one word to me about him. I love him. I may be a fool, but it's been worth all the years of my life to me just to be such a fool, for such a little while. Nothing else has counted — nothing else will — not even if I live to be an old, old woman. I shall live just to be a memory of that. Do you see, Sonny?"

He nodded again.

"And if I can't have it — if I can't — " she reverted to her former tone — "then you see" — she spoke now as if to herself alone — "I shall surely enter the Convent of the Sacred Heart."

"Vonviette!" he exclaimed. "Vonviette — you!"

He looked at her — the daintiest bit of decorated womanhood imaginable — he looked, with a curious appreciation at the moment, of nothing beyond the

reckless value in dollars and cents represented by her extreme elegance. Women's clothes always interested and entertained him — he knew within a quarter the worth per yard of the endless yards of lace on his daughter's filmy gown.

"Yes, I know what you're thinking," she said calmly. "You think that this —" she looked down at herself — "these frills, these jewels, mean so much to me. You think that I could never give them up for a life of toil and hardship. You are wrong. These things mean absolutely nothing to me — nothing."

He argued; he entreated; he was nearly tempted to bitterness.

And then, at last, in the coldness of despair, he said: "I will go. I will go now."

He called up Boothroyd, and asked if he might see him at once, although it was so late.

And then he went out, feeling as if the desolation of lonely old age had settled down upon him. For he had no hope of his errand. He was used to compelling success — he had reached a place where he knew himself powerless as an infant against a giant.

Ah, he had never gone to a man before with a proposition on any such basis as this. Many a man had come to him in an agony which neared the border of insanity, and entreated him to speak the word that would save, if nothing else — the home about which the family affection had rooted itself. He recalled now, feverishly, with an unconscious desire to propitiate some angry, unknown god who threatened his happiness — the good turns that he had done

this one and that — never, since the Forsythe affair, had he wantonly wrecked any man's prosperity; he had merely sought with the utmost consideration for all concerned, how to make it serve his own.

But now, for the first time in his experience, he was to stand in the suppliant's shoes.

He was not thinking what he should say to Boothroyd; that must come as he felt his way. Indeed, it seemed to him that if he should try to put into form what was before him his courage would fail — he would turn about and go home.

"You look tired," said Boothroyd as they shook hands.

"I am." Bronsart gave a sharp, unconscious sigh.

"It has been a serious time for you all," continued the rector considerately.

"Yes — yes." All that seemed such a long way off now. "Mr. Boothroyd" — his voice stuck suddenly in his throat; he shook it loose nervously — "I have not been a friend of yours, as, of course, you know. But you probably do not know how much of an enemy I have been."

"Does that matter now?" Boothroyd spoke coldly; he had as little faith in Bronsart as in any human being he had known — there was no masterpiece of trickery of which he could not have believed him capable. And now the thought at once uppermost in his mind was: "What is he after?"

And Bronsart divined this instantly.

There was only one way to deal with this man.

"Mr. Boothroyd, I believe that once, one went to

your Master and told him that his little daughter was grievously sick. Mine is to-night; I have come to tell you that."

"Miss Bronsart?" exclaimed Boothroyd astonished. "Why, I saw her to-day. I had a long talk with her."

"Did you? I daresay."

Ah, that was, perhaps, when she had made last trial, and then, desperate from defeat, had turned to her father for help.

"That may be, but what I say is, nevertheless, the case. Did it not occur to you that anything was wrong with my little girl when she talked to you."

The colour came hot in Boothroyd's face; he lifted his fine head proudly. For he understood now what Bronsart had come to say to him; his delicacy of feeling for the daughter was outraged by the father's strange lack of it.

"Do you think we need speak of that, Mr. Bronsart?"

"Yes, I do," answered Bronsart steadily. How old he looked, and how beaten. Boothroyd, thinking fast, understood more.

"My daughter is the dearest thing in the world to me," Bronsart went on. "There is nothing — no nothing, I would not do to bring her happiness." He looked unflinchingly straight at the young man. "Some day, perhaps, when you have a little girl of your own, and she grows up beside you into a woman and tells you that she loves some one — that all that you have ever done for her, or ever will do" — his

voice broke — he paused for a moment — "is as nothing to that love — and when you see that it's a love that is going to ruin her life — only then will you understand, perhaps, how I can come to you tonight and beg — beseech you to love my little girl."

There was a silence — of moments long as ages; then Boothroyd said huskily: "I can't, Mr. Bronsart."

There was another silence; then, smothering a sharp sigh, Bronsart said with a pathetic effort towards his usual lightness of manner: "Ah, you're not in a position to take up my proposition. Well, I'm sorry. You probably don't ever intend to marry. That's rather apt to be the pose of a young fellow like you — clerical into the bargain." He hardly knew what he was saying; there was such desperate fear in his heart that he would break suddenly into maudlin tears — grovel at this boy's feet — offer him unavailing bribe to save his daughter from the life to which he knew she would vow herself now. An agony of invective ached upon his closed lips; he longed to tell this arrogant priestling that he would drive an innocent girl into a damned cell — his clenched hands struggled to get at him — to beat him into acquiescence.

"No," said Boothroyd slowly. "It's not quite that." There surged up in him an infinite pity for this suffering father — an infinite regret that he should have been the cause of misery sufficient to drive a man like Christie Bronsart to such a pass as this. Perhaps he could say something that might bring healing to this

wound. "I am not free to love any one," he added in a low voice.

"Oh, is that it?" exclaimed Christie Bronsart. "Don't you think, then, that you might have let us know that before?"

"Ah, but I didn't mean that," said Boothroyd quickly. He hesitated; then he added: "The woman I have loved, I too, can never marry."

Bronsart looked up — his intuition was excited to-night to its utmost limit — he perceived without sight, he understood with no knowledge.

"Ah, you mean Aylmer — I know it," he said with a quick indrawing of his breath — "Aylmer! Does *she* know it?"

"Does she know?" thundered Boothroyd. "I would cut off my right hand before she should know."

"Ah, never mind looking as if you meant to burn me up," said Bronsart unsmiling. "I shouldn't have said that. Perhaps you don't see — how could you? — that this only makes it all the harder for me. But it's all right — it lies between you and me." He stood up. "You're going to-morrow? Well, it's good-bye, then. I must get home to my little girl."

Boothroyd went back to the letter he had been writing, but his mind was in ferment — pity, humiliation, amazement succeeded each other without sequence. Bronsart's dignity, his swift insight, his self-restraint had wiped out a hundred bitterly hostile memories of him — of his treachery, his acutely calculated philanthropies — his pagan philosophy. He

would never again think of him without an instinctive lifting of his hat, as it were.

And Vonviette? — Ah, that was a page read once, and never turned again.

"Dick Neilson's waiting to see you, sir. Shall I tell him he may come in?" It was his landlady's voice at the door."

Like Bronsart, Boothroyd too, was weary. The day had been full of the experiences and difficulties of parting with people whose devotion, it seemed to him now, he had never sufficiently gauged. And the interview with Bronsart had stirred him more than he realized. Ah, that man — how close he stood to the woman from whom Boothroyd's heart ached for some word before he went away. But he would never get that; he knew it. In what agony he had borne the thought of her about with him in those weeks of suspense while her life had trembled in the balance. Just to know that she lived — just to know that somewhere a waste space on this earth was made glad because she did — he knew it was all that he might ever rejoice in. But after all, that was much.

Yes, he was tired, deadly tired, but the day's big battle was yet before him.

"Well, Dick, you came. I'm glad of that, because if you hadn't, I should have gone out to find you. Now, I've got to eat something — I haven't had anything since noon."

In reality he craved quiet. When soul was to meet soul, there was some preparation needed.

And for a long time there was silence.

Boothroyd finished his supper, and then sat as if oblivious of the present — his head thrown back, his eyes closed — only the restless movements of his hands, the clenching and unclenching of the fingers betraying the struggling of his mind.

The boy sat uneasily in a straight chair, his eyes fixed moodily on the floor. Once in a while he raised them to look at the head of a great Christ by a modern interpreter of paint and mysticism upon the opposite wall. The eyes were those of one saying: I am come to seek and to save that which is lost.

The boy quivered under the spell of those seeking eyes. The gay plumage of his youth was all drooping to-night, for he had lost faith in the evil that he had loved. And was it not better to believe in the good in evil than to believe in no good at all? His young eyes hardened; he looked defiantly into those great ones that said: *I am come to seek and to save.*

And then Boothroyd got up, and came over to him, laying his hand on his head.

"Dick Neilson," he began slowly, "you've got about every handicap a mortal can have. You were born wrong to begin with, you've inherited everything wrong. What ought to be the best and finest things become in you the worst. And you've been brought up wrong, but you've made it impossible for you to be brought up right.

"And now you always choose wrong — you don't know how to choose right, or to keep right if you happened to choose right. You're going to the devil — to-night he's sure you're his. He doesn't expect to worry

very much more about you, Dick, and sometimes lately, I've been in such despair about you — for, Dick, Dick — is there anything you can think of that I might have done for you and have failed to do? — and yet I've been in such despair that I've wondered yes, lately I've wondered whether I hadn't just better give up the struggle and let the devil have his own. I've wondered whether, after all, you didn't in truth belong to him."

The boy looked sharply up at him.

"You see, lately, Dick, you've taken love — love, the noblest, the most powerful emotion a man's heart can know, and you've debauched the temple of the holiest within yourself until you no longer understand what the word love means. You did once, boy. But to you now it stands for all that is most hateful, most loathsome in a man's life. Now listen, Dick," — unconsciously the boy answered to the unspoken demand and stood up — "listen. I had a little brother who grew up to be twenty, like you. And, like you, he was called Dick, I think, perhaps, that was why I loved you from the beginning. For you have, too, as he had, the power to win love.

"But when he was twenty he went on, Dick, to work elsewhere. That was not easy to understand, because it seemed as if there was going to be great work for him to do here — work that waits for the doing."

Boothroyd took a deep breath; the boy's eyes never left his face.

"And now, Dick, do you know why I tell you this?

It is because, after to-night, you are never again to be Dick Neilson — you are to be Dick Boothroyd. But you are not only to be called by his name — you are to *be* Dick Boothroyd. You are to think his pure thoughts, to do his noble deeds — you are to learn to be an inspiration to every life that touches yours, as his was. You are to live with me until I teach you how he lived — you are to be trained as he was trained — you are to do the work that he left for you to do. And I lay upon you to-night a mighty task — you are to prove that what was planted in weakness can be raised in strength — that what was sown in dishonour can be raised in honour. You are to show that man's sin cannot hinder God's purposes of righteousness. You who have never known a father, are to become God's son."

Boothroyd's voice wavered suddenly. It had cost him more than Dick would ever know to speak as he had — to do as he had done, and meant to do.

"Oh, Dick," he added almost in whisper, "don't you see that I have loved you with a love that will not let you go?"

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

LOOKING like a wraith of herself, Aylmer paced the brick walk, up and down in the sunshine with Christian beside her. Birds were busy in the thinly green trees discussing the construction of the season's nests; an occasional bee hurried murmuring by, seeking fresh blossom; tiny plants still bearing upon slenderest stem the seed-pod from which they had sprung told again the story of the great mystery as powerfully as the giant evergreens swaying serene against the blue.

"You don't get strong," said Christian anxiously. "I think we had better go away somewhere as soon as possible."

"I think I had," she answered with an emphasis which did not escape him. "I had made up my mind to speak to you about this, when I felt I could."

"Aylmer" — his tone entreated — "why do you hesitate to speak to me about anything that you wish?"

It seemed to him that the old Aylmer had forever departed — the wife of that sweet far-away time, so eager to listen, so ready to respond. The exquisite give and take of married joy — the swift glance, the

passing touch — had all that ever existed between them in the silence too precious for speech?

Ah, but it had — it had! That was the bitterness of it.

Was there nothing he could do? — no way by which he might win their happiness back to them? It was the question that he lay down with at night and awoke to in the morning. Yet as day after day passed it became only the more difficult to him of answer, for he perceived ever more clearly that a gulf once sprung between husband and wife may be more impossible to bridge than any other, even though the cause be trivial. And the cause in this case was not trivial. It ran deep to the roots of all his and Aylmer's conceptions as to the rights of man and woman in marriage.

But further, beyond all that, was the miserable episode from which his memory shrank in disgust.

He looked forward to the years before them, and saw an Aylmer grown indifferently submissive to him, her passionate interests in the great affairs of life dulled by his restrictions and contemptuous disapproval — the mother of his children, perhaps, but no nearer to him than the woman passing in the street.

Ah, with the memory of that love they had known for a little while persistently sweet in his heart, his soul rose hot at the thought of such pallid travesty of happiness as that!

He must — he would have again what he had once had.

But how?

For he began to understand his wife — to see that

the things for which she had suffered were dear to her as life — that the cry of a hungry child was not silenced in her ears by the throwing to it of a crust — that she scorned the smothering of a demand for justice by a gaudy generosity which sought but to spare itself all possibility of sacrifice.

How pathetic had been her attempt to meet the claim of another upon her by the establishment of her garden! And yet because of its very honesty and loyalty of purpose it seemed to him destined to have results that no one had dreamed of — least of all, Aylmer herself.

But in his position what could he do but seek to compensate those beneath him for the bitter inequalities which divided them, by a munificence of contribution towards the easing of their burdens? There was perhaps, no unselfishness in that, but was it not one of the hardships of his position that he was denied the satisfactions of unselfish acting?

What madness to suppose that he could revolutionize the principles by which the Bronsart business was carried on, to suit this or that philanthropic dream! — imperil its profits, its very existence indeed! Of what ultimate benefit would experiments like that be to the men in his employ — men who depended upon him for the means of breath? Nevertheless, he was coming to perceive that there were some things he might do — he had been thinking much of this of late. That ugly fact of the thirty per cent profit made the previous year by the cotton mills in which the firm was so heavily interested — coupled with the knowledge that

such dividends were secured through the employment of children under fourteen, a large proportion of whom received a wage of fifteen cents a day, had disturbed him more than he cared to admit. He would have liked to talk that over with Aylmer, but her attitude to him at present made any attempt at confidences between them impracticable.

"Aylmer," he ventured again anxiously, "if you want to go away let us settle about it now."

"Perhaps we might as well," she said with a little unconscious sigh. "But you will not approve of what I wish to do."

He was ready to exclaim at that — to tell her that hereafter he wished her always to do as she desired, but a quick fear came to him that she had something in mind of which indeed he would not approve. Yet he could not refrain from saying: "Is it necessary to take my disapproval so entirely for granted?"

For a swift instant he felt her eyes upon him; then she said coldly: "I wish to go away for the summer quite alone. I asked your father yesterday if any of them are going to use Iddenkask Cottage, and he said no — that he would be glad for me to make use of it."

"Alone!" The exclamation was wrenched from him.

"Yes — alone," she repeated with no uncertain emphasis.

What a mockery it was — the sunshine, the nesting birds, the gaiety of the young green things! She looked down the long brick wall — often when the snows of winter were thick upon it she had pictured herself, a

young mother in the springtime, lingering there amid the fragrance of the new buds, with her babe upon her arm.

"You mean — that you don't want — me — with you?"

"You?" The word held curious note; she hesitated — then added tremulously: "Don't you understand? — can't you see that it's because — because I want to think about — you — about myself — because I want to find out what this riddle means — that I want, that I *must* be alone. I want to think myself back — back to the beginning of things — to the beginnings of me — I want to find out what belongs to me, and what may belong to another — and when I say another, I mean you."

"Oh, Aylmer!" he cried, "how unfair you are to me! If you would only let me talk to you — only let me explain — "

"Explain!" She drew herself up. "Do you think that I desire explanation — that you could explain?"

She faced him, anger hot in her eyes; and yet, suddenly, her face was wet with tears. "Oh, Christian," she cried, "don't you see that it's because I don't know what you can do — because I don't know what *we* can do — that I must go away alone and think it all out. Don't you see that it's because I'm so afraid" — her voice sank — "afraid that I've lost something."

He would have drawn near to her, but she held him back. "No, no, that's it. Don't you see that I couldn't bear that? You've hurt me too terribly, and in mar-

riage one must not do that. I know, yes, that it can stand more than any other bond could — but — in some ways — so much less."

She was still a moment — then a wave of bitterness overwhelmed her.

"To think of it — just to think of it — that she — *she* — dared to send me those flowers with her love and her sympathy!"

She stood far from him — her eyes blazing with anger.

He could not blame her. He had been sitting beside her, when the nurse had brought in the box for her to open — one of the little pleasures of convalescence. She had picked up the card lying on the lovely blossoms and then dropped it as if stung. "Take them away, please," she had said in the stillest voice to the woman, "and burn them. You understand that I wish you to *burn* them?"

And there he sat, shaken to the depths, yet unable to offer one word of alleviation!

To himself now, he said again as he had said a hundred times before: what madness had possessed him? It was true that in his youth he had known a brief infatuation for Erica Rymal; it had never counted against that mystery of passion which later had made him the husband of Aylmer.

And he had fancied to take revenge — to drive a woman like his wife back to petty obedience by the employment of so vulgar a trick as the simulation of a preference for another woman — and the woman he had chosen to use as tool for the experiment one

infinitely clever at the game of making tools of men!

"But there, that's over!" exclaimed Aylmer, her manner weary again. "The thing now is to find out how to go on. Many women just shuffle on from day to day without facing their problems. They are afraid of the consequences. I am, too. But I shall face them."

She looked so frail — so pathetically girlish in spite of all that she had suffered. And Christian felt helplessly that he only longed to take her in his arms — it was the one answer that he knew to all their griefs.

"You see I do not feel different from what I did before," she went on. "I mean about all those questions that troubled me so — whether I may have so much, when others have so little. I want to get away where life is simple, so that I may think this muddle all out. You see, Christian — Oh, if you only *could* see that it is a muddle."

"But Aylmer — " he broke in eagerly, and then paused. For in reality how little he cared about any muddle, except the big one that just concerned them.

"Well, now I have told you what I wish," she said, turning towards the house, "and I want to go at once. I am so tired of everything."

A fortnight later she was gone. He entreated to be allowed to go with her and see her settled in the cottage, but she would not hear of that.

"You would feel that the trail of the serpent had been over it all, I suppose," he said half sadly, half bitterly, as he stood beside her in the train, waiting for the moment of farewell.

She looked up at him with her dear, honest eyes. "You must have patience. Some time perhaps — " the train moved; he leaned over and kissed her — the first time in months.

"Oh, Christian — "

But he was gone.

Aylmer had parted from her father the night before after an interview which had tried them both.

"My dear, I really cannot understand how you can reconcile it with your duty as a wife, to leave your husband for all the summer like this."

"Oh, dad," she exclaimed wearily, "I told you once before that that expression has no meaning for me. There is no such thing as my duty as a wife. The mere doing of duty like that never brought and never could bring happiness to any one — to any home. Love, the only thing that brings happiness, is not a duty, but a privilege."

"Well, then," he said with some impatience, "I don't see how you reconcile it with the privileges that are yours, to go away in this selfish kind of manner. At any rate, it has the appearance of selfishness, my child."

"Oh, dad dear, I can't reconcile it with anything." There was the tremble of tears in her voice.

"It's all a puzzle to me." He looked at her a long time in silence. "Here are you two — you have everything that heart can crave — you can do everything you want to do, and yet you are not contented. My dear" — his soul was full of anxiety for his child — "have you ever thought that what you really need is the peace of God in your hearts?"

It took great courage for him to say this to her.

"Yes, dad, yes," Aylmer answered gently. "That is what we need, but the problem is, how to get it."

"Why, my child, the peace of God comes through believing on His Son, who takes away all sin."

"Oh, dad," she exclaimed vehemently, "it can never come to us — to Christian and me, by any such easy method as that. The peace of God! Think of the justice, the unselfishness, the purity of thought and word and deed that must lie behind the possession of so great a gift as the peace of God in one's heart. We must attain that for ourselves — it can never be won for us through the sufferings of another."

He looked at her in sorrow. "My child, the human intellect has always sought to belittle the great sacrifice of God's Son — to endeavor by its own vain sacrifices to prove that it does not require His."

And he went away from her sorrowful. She had great possessions, but she was not using them in the Master's service.

Christian went back to his silent house when the business day was done, and thought that he realized how people felt when they entered the home again after they had borne away their dead — the spirit was gone.

After dinner he tried to read, but the printed words became a meaningless blur. Half a day had taken her far from him — she was by now in another world, thinking thoughts in which he had no share, in which she wished him to have no share.

He went up-stairs and passed the closed door of her

room; he had no courage to look in upon its desolation. For weeks it had been the spot about which all the house life had revolved — its very stillness breathed of her.

His little child had been born there — had there drawn its few uncertain breaths, and then returned to the vast unexplained silence out of which it had come.

The child had gone, but Aylmer had remained.

He thought of his own little mother. When she knew that she was to go, and her child to stay, had she wondered perhaps why his life must cost her so dear? Or had she gone out glad, with the cry of the child that was to live, sweet to her failing sense; had she not given him life and what else mattered?

Life — what great and what little values human beings gave to it, in laying it down without relenting if thereby another might but have it! A man fought to the last gasp to save to himself the misery of mutilated existence, and courted death with high unconcern if he might but bear a wounded comrade to safety. What strange shifting of values in the Great Presence!

And it was this that Aylmer was seeking to do now — to sort and classify the values of human existence. His heart ached to think of her alone, amid the silence of the northern woods, facing without flinching, this great puzzle of life.

The long hours of the night passed, but he tossed, sleepless, thinking of her, wondering what he was to do to win her heart back to him. He had a strong, proud will; he realized clearly that he would never be content simply to acquiesce in her schemes for the

sake of harmony. Even now, aching as he was to set time back twenty-four hours that he might think of her as again under the roof with him, breathing the same air, he understood that it was not in him merely to follow as his wife might lead. Of late he had even been growing conscious of himself as resenting in an unprecedented way his father's summary settlement of matters in the business in which it seemed to him that he might have been granted the privilege of opinion. But Christie Bronsart had the brilliant advantage of always knowing exactly what he wanted. His son, on the contrary, was becoming aware of himself as not at all clear as to what it was most desirable to want. He realized how sensitive he had grown to the fact that every penny of their income was questioned by Aylmer as to its honesty of origin. The Bronsart business had achieved its paramount position through a great steal. That was not a fact calculated to reassurance as to its present honour. "And we're into half a dozen outside things that I wouldn't have her know anything about for the world," reflected Christian miserably. "But if we weren't, some one else would be."

But that argument grew less and less palliative under consideration.

A lonely month passed in which he threshed out unceasingly the conditions under which he had taken it for granted he meant to conduct his life. How he longed for a word from Aylmer, but none came or was to be expected, and under no circumstances was he to write to her. "Any letter that you or I might write now would mean nothing to either of us," she had

contended. "We should merely write for the conventional reason that we thought it was the proper thing to do, and it is to escape all such shams for a time that I am going away at all."

The man's mind was in tumult — deep, wide-reaching. Unknown to himself he had drifted far out upon a sea which had no near shore.

He grew ever lonelier; his desolation seemed to him more than he could bear.

And then one night, there came to him an inspiration so sudden, so powerful, that he seemed for some moments but to hold it breathless, unthinking, only conscious that he had it — there, in his aching grasp — an inspiration that, could she but know it —

Ah, but that was it — she must know nothing of it.

He could have shouted aloud for joy. For perhaps — perhaps, this was to be the way out for them both. For then he would *know* — it would be no longer a question of his opinion against what *she thought she knew*. On his side there would be the authority of actual experience.

He waited for a few days, to be sure of himself and the wisdom of his purpose. And then he went to his father.

Christie Bronsart heard him out in silence, and in silence sat after he had finished what he had come to say.

"Of course you don't approve — you couldn't," said Christian nervously. "You think I'm absolutely a lunatic."

"Yes, that is of course exactly what I think," his father answered with a sigh. And then was silent again.

Christian had felt prepared for any extreme of delicately abusive sarcasm; this unexpected lack of opposition disturbed him, as that could not possibly have done. What was the matter? Was anything wrong anywhere? It occurred to him that he had been paying scant heed to his father of late. Why, he looked old, curiously shrunken in spite of that deceptive jauntiness of appearance which impressed the casual beholder.

"Why, father, something's wrong. I'm afraid I haven't noticed — I've been so bothered about my own affairs — what is it? — nothing about Grimscombe, I hope."

"Grimscombe? Oh, no, no! What do I care about that?"

Christian stared at his father, for the Grimscombe project had meant more, he knew, to that brilliant commercial strategist than half-a-dozen other important deals.

But Bronsart braced himself to talk.

"You're quite right, my boy, about your absorption in your own affairs. But that was to be expected. I didn't blame you, or wonder at it. Each of us must live his own life."

"But, father, what is the matter?"

"Doesn't seem to me I know how to tell you, boy." Bronsart leaned against his desk, his eager fingers hanging nerveless. "It's Vonviette, you see."

Vonviette!"

"Yes. I guess it's time you knew, and I'll get over it quickly. But it sort of burns me — even to tell you, my boy. It will be hard for you to understand — and be fair to — my little girl. It's like this. The night before Boothroyd left here Vonviette told me that she loved him, but that he didn't love her — that he had never even thought of such a thing — don't understand that myself — never saw a woman yet that I didn't wonder whether I couldn't love her if the absolute need arose. But you see the end of the matter was that I had to go and tell Boothroyd — that she loved him."

Christian whistled softly. Nothing could have been more impressive than his father's entirely unimpressive manner.

"I had to ask him if he couldn't persuade himself to love my little girl," continued Bronsart in a voice that hardened. "Well, he couldn't, and there was nothing left for me but to go home and tell her that. She was waiting for me in the dark." He paused; then added in a shaken tone: "I've done some hard things in my life, my boy, but I've never done anything that cost me what that did. Because I knew the alternative, you see."

"The alternative?"

"Yes." It was a very slow "yes." But then a storm of anger shook him into energy. "My little girl — think of it — that little dainty, delicate thing goes away next month to enter some damned saint factory — convent, they call it — a damned refuge for female

ineligibles — and all that her mother finds to say about it is, that after all, it's so sweet, so *distingué* to have a nun in the family. Oh, there isn't anything for me to kick about in that. I know just what kind of a blamed fool I gave my little girl for a mother, and I know just why I did it. I wanted that hundred thousand of hers so badly for that Carbonburg proposition that I couldn't afford to think what kind of a woman went with it — it wouldn't wait, and it meant millions. And that's what kills me now. If my little girl was all Bronsart she'd have enough clear judgment never to do a thing like this. But she isn't all Bronsart — she's one-tenth fool — and that one-tenth is going to see down and out all that's worth anything in her make-up. My boy, the man that gives his child a fool for a mother undertakes to pay at sight a note bearing an unspecified rate of interest that never fails to come due."

Christian had listened aghast. There flashed back to him a remark of his father's made to him long ago: "Whatever else may be, Aylmer is the sort of woman to have great children."

Ah, there was no denying that, and he understood as never before what that might mean to a man.

But his father — his poor father!

"But surely — won't she listen to you — why, little Vonviette — "

"Listen to me?" Bronsart's gesture was one of despair. "My boy, she doesn't know the meaning of the word reason any more. She's had her own way all her life, and now for the first time that she finds she can't

have what she demands, there is no frenzy of self-destruction — for that's what this is — too cruel for her towards herself. Oh, she's quiet enough — I'd rather see her breaking her head against a stone wall. She listens to all I say and makes no answer."

"But how does such a thing as this happen? Who has been influencing her?"

"Oh, it's that blamed sweet Sister Mary Frances. They've been inseparable for months. Of course, I didn't know anything about that, and it wouldn't have made any difference if I had. I should never have been afraid of anything like this from a girl of Vonviette's stamp."

"No, I suppose one wouldn't. And yet I'm not sure that it wasn't the very sort of thing to expect."

"Perhaps so — perhaps so," said Bronsart wearily.

"Have you been to see this sister — have you tried — "

"Have I been to see her? I guess I've worn the pavement thin going there. I've been to see Father Norris, too, until I'm tired, and he was long ago. But it's not to be expected, is it? — that out of sympathy for my sufferings they should offer to turn down a proposition like Vonviette."

"But Boothroyd — who would have dreamed of her caring for him? And you couldn't do anything with him? Of course — the money — I suppose — "

"Oh, the money! That's a minus sign to the sort he is. I wouldn't wonder if he mightn't have cared for my little Von if that hadn't prejudiced him against her from the beginning. Oh, I don't know though. I

guess the kind of woman he'd fancy would be quite a different sort."

"Hm! I imagine he's the sort that's too selfishly absorbed in his work ever to care for any woman."

"Maybe — maybe. But I'm not sure."

"Well, I am. That man will never get married; you'll see."

"Ah, I daresay not."

Shrewd analyst of himself and his fellow creatures that Bronsart was, it occurred to him at the moment that had any one desired proof of that sentimentality of which he was occasionally accused by bewildered critics, they would have found ample in the fact that he had at no time felt the least inclination to belittle the seriousness of Vonviette's attachment to Boothroyd, or that of Boothroyd for the woman impossible to him. He accepted them as phenomena by no means open to the sneers of that *blasé* philosophy which he professed to find quite adequate for the every day of life.

Did Christian suppose that a woman of such profound attraction for a certain type of man as Aylmer, would go through life with that attraction unrecognized, merely because she happened to be his wife? Bless the boy!

"So now you see just what the difficulty is that occupies my mind day and night. I am not able to think of anything else. It seems to me that my life stretches away before me without anything in it worth working for any more. I'm going to get older every day, and I'm going to be more and more alone all the

time. And there isn't anything quite so lonely in all this world as a lonely old man, with no women folks about him that belong to him."

"But you'll have us," protested Christian. It could never have occurred to him that it would be possible for his father to develop a frame of mind like this.

"You? Yes, I'll have you. But if you ever have a daughter, my boy, you'll discover that she's something to you that nothing else can be. And I'd lay my little girl in her grave with more joy than I shall see her going into that convent. But now we'll drop that. I've said enough. We'll come back to your affairs." He paused and looked fretfully at the immense jar of roses on the table beside him. "Now, if that isn't like Carter. Over and over again I've told him that he must not send mixtures down to the office. If they like to do that kind of thing at the house, well and good, but I won't stand such atrocity here. I don't wonder the Japanese scorn our ideas of art. There! now couldn't any fool understand that these alone are beauty, and the mixing of two or three kinds abomination? But your roses are finer than mine this year, Christian. Hillman's a smarter man than Carter."

"Perhaps. But Aylmer has taken such pains with Hillman."

"Ah, I suppose. Well, as I was saying, I think you're a fool, Christian. But it doesn't matter what I think, does it? Because you mean to do this, don't you?"

Christian met his father's quick look squarely. "Yes."

"That's it. Then there's little need of my saying anything. There was a time when I should have said: My son, if you're going in for any such mad caper as that I'll — well, we'll leave that to the imagination. I don't see how business is going to be done, though, if this kind of maggot's going to keep on eating into it. But I don't have to understand. I took hold of my day and generation with both hands. You've got to do the same. I've no respect for the man who's only a coupon clipper. Since I was ten years old I've been busy doing things — you can't look at this city and not recognize that. And I want my son to go right on doing things. It appears to me that you will, and that you won't do them my way. All right, my boy, go ahead. The day that's coming is yours. You've got to meet it. It's not my problem. I've made my mistakes and I don't know why I should grudge you yours. A mistake is about the wisest turn a smart man can do himself anyway. To me, of course, it seems as if it would be hard to think out a more colossal one than you're bent on making now, but after all, 'tisn't calculated to hurt anybody but yourself that I can see, and there's peace of mind in that. And incidentally, you will probably learn a good deal."

"Father, what an open-minded duck you are!" exclaimed Christian.

"Oh, I don't know." Bronsart laughed carelessly; in reality his son's words were sweet to his sore heart. "It's only plain sense to understand that nearly all the mischief in the world comes because somebody is determined to make somebody else do things his

way. Oh, human beings are a darned lot of asses anyway."

"It's the old story — the woman rules," he thought as he looked at his son. "Underneath it all it's Aylmer — Aylmer. He doesn't know that. He has all kinds of fine excuses fixed up in his mind. Oh, the Forsythe has got the upper hand in great shape." He sighed sharply; there was bitterness in some of the thoughts that came to him.

Late that afternoon he passed Forsythe in town, and greeted him in the jaunty manner so detestable to the other. But what he thought was: "Ah, you've beaten the Bronsart all along the line — all along the line. Don't you understand, John Forsythe, that I've only begun paying the note I signed in your favour the day I ruined you? — I've got to keep paying it as long as I live."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

AT Iddenkask the quiet days went by, leaving no happening but sunrise and sunset behind them. And day after day Aylmer sat on the wide piazza and looked down over the beauty before her, as through a mist. In time she learned to know every mood of the little bay, caught fast by cedar-shadowed shore, its narrow entrance sentinelled by two lonely islands, beyond which, to the simple minds of the Moravian inhabitants, stretched that mysterious blot upon creation known as the "world."

The cottage, which had been built by Bronsart in a period of fishing fervour of which he had soon exhausted the effervescence, stood on a ridge high above the shore, in a dense growth of pine and cedar; in front the ground dropped to the water's edge, with the view unobscured save by a few great oaks upon the roadway. The tiny village clung to the shore to the north; when she was out on the bay sailing with Adolf, Aylmer felt the pathetic human interest that it gave to the lonely coast-line, with its cottages clustered close about the little white-spired church as if for protection from the storms of life; away over the hill was the cemetery, in which according to the early community

idea, there was no separation of lot — in the great sleep each lay next to the other, in the order of translation into blessedness. If Adolf, the caretaker of the cottage, and Ina his wife, felt any astonishment or curiosity concerning the fact that a young "great lady" should come alone to Iddenkask, and so remain there, they gave no evidence of it. They probably accepted the case as merely new proof of the idiosyncrasies of the people "out there" who spent their lives in the doing of strange things. And the same spirit of devotion towards Aylmer which had developed in Mariette — Mariette, proud conservator of the traditions and divine rights of privilege inhering in noble blood — showed sign of rapid growth in Ina, whose simple faith was founded upon the principle: "All ye are brethren." And as time passed Aylmer became conscious of a tender intimacy of feeling for this woman, whose life had been one of hardship and rending sorrow. The woman — how heavily the burden fell upon her in this fair spot, a very Eden of beauty. She married young, bore the children — or died bearing them — milked the cows, tilled the fields, and in the long evenings sat busy-handed, toiling still, while her husband smoked heavily by the fireside. As long as she could work, she must; rest came only on the quiet hilltop, where one slept well.

As she delved deeper into acquaintance with the neighbourhood history, she discovered that underneath the occasional gaiety, the impassive calm, there was ever the deep, unfailing note of pathos. These people met the agonies of life with the massive peace

of despair, and said unquestioning: "God's will be done."

When Sunday came she went to the little white church and sat in a pew with a row of fair-haired children, whose eyes had the marvellous blue which comes to a race that has looked long upon the sea. She understood nothing, for the service was in Norwegian, yet rarely had she been so thrilled. The God these people believed in was so near — so indisputably real. He rode into their peaceful bay upon the thunders of the storm; He spoke and the rain fell upon thirsty fields; He willed it, and the sun shone, ripening, upon the grain.

The minister interested her — how came a man of such distinction of manner in a little wayside pulpit like this? She could feel his tenderness for this feeble flock, and the faithfulness with which he was ministering to it.

The deep chorales rose and fell in minor, monotonous chord, the women's voices etching themselves lightly against the strong tones of the men — the long notes sung in unison produced an effect that set Aylmer's heart a-quiver; tears gathered under her downcast lids. She thought of the wonderful services she had listened to in some of the world's greatest cathedrals—of one in Cologne where an immense congregation had sung as only a German people could—of one, a series of marvellous effects, in the Madeleine — another, in the Lady Chapel in Strassbourg; and above all others, of one in St. Paul's, where religious emotion had seemed to reach its utmost sublimity of appeal.

Yet here, amid these bare grey walls, in spite of a service sealed to her, there came upon her an exaltation of spirit due to no glory of stained-glass window, to no effect of angelic voice soaring in an ecstasy of sound among arches dim with the twilight of centuries — to no majesty of ritual which had borne upward before the throne the petitionings of the children of God from one generation to another. What grim Covenanter, ancestor of hers, had known this same kindling of the flame, in hurried gathering of his little band on rocky mountain side, to seek above the cold sky that God of Righteousness, whom his eyes of faith discerned beyond the clouds of time and sense? — unconscious comrade in passionate emotionalism of the soul that sought the Spirit in that magnificence of liturgic appeal which but reeked to him of the blasphemies of the Pit.

Aylmer loved to talk to Adolf; his slow careful English had a distinct charm in comparison with the clipped, slurred speech of the common American.

"Our minister," he said to her in response to a question, as they sailed dreamily over the blue one warm afternoon — "our minister is an educated man — we will not have a man who knows nothing preach to us."

"How odd!" she exclaimed abruptly. For she had not thought of education as having meaning even to these people remote from the world — that big world where education stood for an improved chance in the competitive game of existence.

"Yes. We Moravians at David" — it was the name

of the tiny hamlet — "are particular about our minister. But over at Jonathan, ach! our minister have often pick up their minister from the road, drunk, drunk — and drive him home like a bag potatoes. I myself have one day seen that shame. But at Jonathan they are Tchermans — you understand?"

"Jonathan! David and Jonathan! How curious it is," she exclaimed.

"Yes. David was the name of the first Norwegian settler here. Then when some of our people went over to the settlement to live they call it Jonathan, because we were all friends. But the Tchermans came in there. It is big place now — three hundred maybe. And we are not friends again. They take stones in their pockets to hit the Moravians when they are going to church. It is sad. Our minister say: 'Love your enemies.' That is easier when once they are good and dead. See! We come to the haunted house. You like to go in there?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Aylmer doubtfully. "How do you come to have a haunted house here?"

"We call it that — that is all. It belong to Conrad Olsen. He sail all over the world. Every time he come home, some one else was dead — his son, his daughter, his wife. At last he come home and there was no one. He stay there one winter all alone, and he say he must do something to make him happy. So he make his coffin. He work and work, and when spring come, he sail away. Then he come home again and he say he feel not lonely any more — his coffin was there to bid the day to every morning. And he work and work on it

again with many carvings, and when spring come he sail away again, and he never come home. He was drown away out by China they say. That is our life," concluded Adolf. "We work hard over what we not need. You like to see that haunted house?"

"Yes, I will," said Aylmer. It was no longer repellent to her — ghostly. A spirit touchingly weak, humanly dependent, made appeal to her from the silence investing the place.

The boat ran lightly inshore; she stepped off. "I wait for you — there is no fear," said Adolf serenely. He lighted his omnipresent pipe. Aylmer went slowly up the uneven steps of single stones, thinking back to the sailor who came home to find that each time death had mounted the worn flags before him.

The house stood in a little clearing among the pines — the paint once fresh upon it served now but to disclose the weather-beaten boards. The veranda which creaked noisily as she stepped upon it showed wide gaps in the flooring; at the windows there hung still the curtains which some woman's loving hands had arranged fresh and white against the traveller's return.

It was a house dead, yet testifying eloquently of life. Aylmer turned the door-handle and stepped in; no door was ever barred against wayfaring stranger by these open-hearted people. "Oh, don't you lock the door, Ina?" she had asked on the night of her arrival, when she found it still unfastened as she was preparing to go up-stairs.

"Why no, ma'am," replied Ina astonished, "some one want to come in, may be."

She stepped in, afraid, yet curious to share the emotions with which Conrad Olsen had taken his last look upon the home spot before he sailed away upon that journey which was to end only in the harbour of a sea upon which he had never before spread canvas.

There, before her, in the middle of the homely living-room with its simple furniture unstirred, stood the coffin upon rude trestles. It bore quaint resemblance to the form of a ship — clumsy fingers had worked long and lovingly upon the woman's head at the prow; it struck Aylmer that it must have been meant as the likeness of a face beloved in life.

In the corner behind the door, a sunbonnet and shawl hung on a nail; beside them, a sailor's rough jersey — mute, inanimate things which yet appealed powerfully to her as possessing a conscious joy in the nearness of one to the other.

She closed the door softly, as if fearful that the memories enshrined there might be distressed by her intrusion, and went, silent, down to Adolf, and they sailed away again into the glittering blue.

Love — there in that tiny cottage two human beings had set themselves to find out its meaning.

But perhaps to one the revelation had only come when the great shadow had shut out all the world beside.

That evening Aylmer sat late on her piazza and looked long towards the cliff where the cottage lay deep within the pines. The sunset flamed in bars of bronze across the pale west — from the dull grey east implacable night drew her purple veil across the

paling blue and against it tossed from her limitless store, first this star, then that, until she blazed imperial-gemmed, upon the darkling waters. No sound but the faint tinkle of distant cattle-bells and the restless wash of the waves upon the sand broke the long line of silence.

Home! — how far away it seemed. She had been here weeks now — no, it was already months. She had almost succeeded in forgetting that she belonged anywhere else; she had become absorbed in these people — their joys and their sorrows she had made hers — they knew that. She could have told why Anna Larsen would never marry young Helgesen — how Engebret Mondsen had come by those terrible burns on his face and hands — brave, silent Engebret — for had she not sat a night with Sophie Andersen, holding the convulsed hands when that rare and terrible attack had her in its grip — that calamity of her innocent existence known only to her mother and Engebret. She knew the dark story which divided two of the godliest men in the community — the sympathy and comprehension with which she had listened to it had done more to wipe away its bitterness than all the lapse of years.

She had come to this isolated spot, that aloof from the anxieties and responsibilities of life she might study its problems with a clear mind. And now, strangely it occurred to her that she was living out the days without any heed to those questions which had so burnt in her heart; she had forgotten her own distresses in sharing those of these people. There was the

boy with the hungry eyes who ached for the education to be got "out there" — a longing so impossible of apparent fulfilment that it seemed to him little short of criminal to acknowledge it. "Oh, Jert, Jert," she said to him once, "some day you will be a great man" — she was sure of that — "and then you will remember that line in your litany that the pastor translated for me the other day: '*From the unhappy desire of becoming great, spare us, good Lord.*' But that couldn't have any meaning yet for you, Jert."

Aylmer heard from her father regularly, but he made no mention of Bronsart matters; she had asked him not to do so, and it was not difficult for him to refrain. She read these letters with a desire not to remember but to forget what they said, for they revealed that her father felt himself out of sympathy with his daughter and her doings at present.

The extreme physical lassitude and depression from which she had been suffering when she came up, had lifted — the long hours in the woods and out upon the water were ministering to her in ways of which she was unconscious; she felt only that the blood began to flow with its old-time eagerness in her veins, and that when she awoke in the morning it was joy to have the day before her.

Sometimes — yes — but she was not to think of those things now. They were all away — those questions — beyond the islands — some day she would have to sail out and down to meet them — but not yet, not yet.

"Oh, Adolf, come here," she called from the piazza one morning. "What boat is this coming in?"

Adolf went slowly and got the glass. "I never see that boat before," he said at length. "She full of city people — clothes, hats, you know."

They stood and watched the launch approach; a chill of fear shook Aylmer. Mrs. Bronsart and Vonviette — of course — Erica Rymal perhaps. She could not bear it — she looked longingly at the woods behind the cottage. Oh, if she might but escape to them.

The boat drew into the dock with much screaming of a stylish whistle; it seemed to her as she walked slowly down the path to meet these guests, whoever they might be, that an atmospheric vulgarity travelled with them — the little bay with the gaudy boat upon it took on a look of tawdry unreality; it seemed like the scene on the curtain of a theatre.

"Oh, how lovely! How sweet! How utterly dear!" were the expressions that greeted her as she drew within hearing.

"Mr. Inderrieden!" — she shook hands remotely.

A little sigh escaped her — there were no Bronsarts here. Yet it was the gayest of the city's gay — the people she met daily "out there."

"Why, we're down at St. George," they chattered. "Such fun to come up and surprise you — we never realized we could get at you until this morning. — Well, you and your husband always manage to do the original thing, don't you? — you here, playing the shepherdess, and he off — where is it? — And Vonviette — don't you call it simply awful of her? — Oh,

you perfectly stunning thing in that five-cent gown — you needn't tell me that you don't know that you never looked so distracting in your life! — Mercy! and not a man in sight! Why, you're as bad as Vonviette. But don't you believe she'll change her mind before her probation — that's what they call it, isn't it? — or is it novitiate, is over? — Oh, no, no, Vonviette won't. She isn't that kind. — Oh, girls, did you ever see such an utterly magnificent fireplace, and that queer old man, and the funny old woman in such a cap. Oh, can she understand? — they look so wooden, don't they? — Yes, we'll stay to lunch. It's taken us hours to get here, and there's a dance on to-night. You must come back with us, in that identical gown. You won't? My, I should think you would be bored to death here. Why, there isn't a thing in sight but land and sea and sky. Never is more than that anywhere? Well, I guess you'd think there was if you came down to St. George. — But do tell, we're all just dying to know — what you're really here for. Perhaps you're writing an Elizabeth in her G. G. book. Oh, girls, we've hit it! — Weren't you surprised to hear Erica Rymal is going to marry old Wardrope? I suppose Mrs. Bronsart is helping her get her trousseau in Paris. But wouldn't you have thought she'd have stayed at home this year? — Yes, I met Mr. Bronsart the day before we came away — he looked *haggard* — and Christian off, too. It's too bad. But Mr. Bronsart's game. You can't coax a sigh out of him. — Oh, just look, isn't the view from this window too utterly unique for words? — Yes, that old Wardrope —

why, you can hear his bones creak as he walks. Oh, but Erica can put up with him for the millions in it. — Yes, but if he doesn't die as she intends him to — Well, he won't. He's the tough and obstinate brand. — Oh, you'll see Erica will develop into an austerely pious person. Just give her a little time. — That's so. Women specialize in two subjects — men and religion, together or singly as circumstances render necessary or prudent. — I think so, too. Just look at Vonviette. I remarked casually to her the last time I saw her that if it would help her to change her decision at all, I was quite ready to sacrifice myself on the matrimonial altar for her sake. And she just said in the sweetest way: 'Willy, I know you would, but where did you get that tie?' — Oh, there are going to be no end of weddings this fall. Grant Kent is to marry Edith Abell of Baltimore — that's flying pretty high, isn't it? — but Grant's progressive. He's the kind that in five years will wonder why he didn't elevate the President's daughter to the wearing of his name."

"Mrs. Bronsart" — it was Inderrieden speaking — he had waited long for his moment — "this rabble — you detest it, of course. But it gives me the chance of seeing you again. But why — " he hesitated.

"Please don't misunderstand," said Aylmer. "There are no whys in my life just now. — I'm so happy," she added breathlessly. "I love the loneliness. I want nothing else."

"Ah, you want nothing. You — "

"Except my husband," she interposed swiftly. "Yes, I want — Oh, I want Christian."

What was it? — the sudden quiver in her voice — the tender emphasis upon the name — a simplicity as of girlhood again upon her — something was touched deep in the heart of the man.

"I see," he said lightly. "Well, every woman to her taste, and surely no one can criticise Mrs. Bronsart's."

"Oh, just look at the time. We've simply got to rush. — Yes, it's been delightful. — Doesn't it give you the creeps to look at that lovely cottage. — No, we can't come up again, our time's getting so short. — There! doesn't she look sweet in that pose, so rustic and all that. It leaves an utter picture in one's mind. Where? In my mind, I said. — Oh, my dear, how lonely you'll feel after we're gone."

The boat with its load of "clothes and hats" moved off, and was soon a far-away blot upon the little bay. As it passed out beyond the islands it awoke the mighty echo with its frisky whistle — a series of most fantastic sounds came pirouetting back around the shore.

Aylmer went indoors to help Ina efface the appalling disarray of the cottage; she set the doors wide that the sweet wind from the pines might sweep away the costly commercial odours which profaned the place.

"Oh, Ina, I'm so tired," she said with a sigh, laying her hands on the old woman's shoulders. "I'm so glad to be alone with you again."

"That's right — that's right. I get you some tea now." The wrinkled face beamed; Ina had been confusedly afraid that this coming of the people among whom she lived, might make her "lady" dissatisfied.

And she, Ina, was she not in these days living a life of such fullness of happiness as she had never known?

The evening shadows deepened; the long shore-line was still; not a wave broke upon the sand. Away in the west the sun sank, an avenging ball of flame upon the water; heavy masses of cloud smothered the crimson afterglow; a sullen grey spread slowly over the blue. Suddenly a hot breath licked the surface of the water; it fluttered like a thing awakening to life; a moment more and it was in a black frenzy.

"I see a big storm come," said Adolf. "Maybe you like that?" For each day he discovered anew that there was no accounting for tastes. Had he not been made to sit in the boat with oars unstirred for half an hour at a time, that Aylmer might "feel the silence?"

The great masses of cloud piled themselves ever deeper; the whole west was in torment. Miles away the roar of the waves made ceaseless cannonade; the furious spray dashing high against the islands hid them at times as in a mist; the faint daylight still lingering against the sky shimmered copper-coloured before the storm which swept on preceded by what seemed the black breath of some mighty monster of space. And high upon the storm-line a vessel rode, her masts bare sticks against the thin sinister streak of light where sea met sky.

"Oh, look, Adolf! Why, the boat. Don't you see it will be wrecked?" Aylmer watched it through the glass. "It's tossing like a chip."

"Oh, that's Jake," said Adolf unmoved. "He'll get under the island. Oh, that's nothing." He spread his

fingers contemptuously, and lighted the pipe of contemplation.

"Now you better go in," he remarked a few minutes later. "She's here."

But ten minutes later "she" had passed, leaving a tangle of fallen trees in the forest; not a leaf stirred again; the stars came out serene in the purple sky; only the waves rushed raging upon the shore, and the raindrops fell like hail from the sodden branches.

"Don't you think you better come in now," asked Ina, peering into the darkness of the piazza an hour and more later.

"Oh, no, no — not yet," said Aylmer in a smothered voice.

Christian, Christian — away, and she did not even know where ! And Vonviette — what had they meant ? What had been happening to them while she had been leading here her selfish life, all free of care ?

Christian! She breathed his name out upon the darkness. How was she to live through another night here, and not *know ?*

Ah, she must be calm, and think it out reasonably. Christian was away and apparently he had been away for a long time. Well, under those circumstances he might at least — No! how could he after all that she had said ? She did not want a man to crawl at her feet.

Well, he had not done that certainly.

And Vonviette — some amazing thing must have happened if really — but they all seemed to know — to be so sure.

Loud and sweet, quite close to her, a whippoorwill began his plaintive call. Then faint and fainter as he flew back into the forest deeps grew the rising and falling notes.

Yes, yes, she was a woman, with the torment of a woman's problems upon her, but she was Christian's wife, and she loved him — *loved* him.

The flame-tipped fingers of the dawn lifted the grey veil of night; another day rose fair in the east and found her wide-eyed, wondering how she was to bear it.

But she met it and many more before the peace of a fixed resolution entered her heart. Because, she *must* think it out — for his sake.

She went far back to the beginnings — she felt again the glow of that golden moment when she had first known herself beloved — Ah, the sweetness of it now in her memory was more than she knew how to bear.

And their marriage — she mused long, the shadows of remembrance deep in her eyes.

How had all this later misery of separation come to them after such a beginning? What should she have done that she had failed to do — to prevent it?

Day after day she asked that question and got no answer. And then her heart began to repudiate all need of reply; it cried: "Christian, Christian," and refused to be appeased by argument.

But Erica Rymal — Erica Rymal — was that a thing for a wife lightly to condone?

Did that woman believe that because Christian was angry with his wife, he cared for her — really cared?

She held her head high — even old Adolf wondered at the sudden blaze in her eyes.

Christian had been a fool.

Well?

Like a child with his blocks she had built too high a tower — suddenly it had wavered and fallen. She had wanted to do such great things — to change the current of a life in a day — her own — her husband's — poor Lucy's.

What immeasurable desolation she had felt when she came home that Sunday evening after Boothroyd's last sermon and found Lucy gone. She had sat down in the girl's empty room and looked helplessly about at the pretty trifles with which she had sought to make it attractive, and there was the tragic little message pinned to the curtain: "I'm not going away because I don't love you. I can't help going."

She had sat there a long time, repeating monotonously that she had failed — failed. She was unconscious of her precarious nervous condition and of the effect upon her of the sermon she had just heard — it simply seemed necessary that she should try to realize calmly where she stood. She had failed, and lost the girl; she had hopelessly alienated her husband. She had driven him into doing what would have been impossible to him but for her high-handed independence of him — and now — she was alone, so helplessly alone.

She began to sob, such strange dry sobs, and in a moment to her horror she was screaming — she, Aylmer!

And then Miriam had run in and gathered her into her strong arms, and she listened, shocked, to her own loud cry: "Oh, Miriam, Miriam, don't let them hear me."

That was the last she had known very clearly, until she awakened that bright morning and lay so content, watching the dancing of the sunshine upon the walls of her pretty room.

And then the first time that she had opened her eyes and found Christian beside her, his face so white and strained! — she had turned her head away from him — it was cruel, but after all that had happened was she to clutch at reconciliation?

Ah, if he had only bent over and taken her in his arms!

She smiled now, even through a mist of tears. What made a man—one's own husband—so dense?

Afraid of her? — of course he was. But what business had he, Christian, to be afraid of her, Aylmer his wife?

He had proposed to conquer her by obstinacy — it was no way with a woman, and he with an armory full of weapons before which she never could stand!

But she? — was not this argument one that cut both ways? Had she not willed to conquer him with the logic of coldly reasoned fact? A beautiful light came into her eyes. "Oh Christian, Christian!" she murmured, longing.

Afraid of her? Of course he must be — forever afraid of that in herself which she held most high, beyond the touch that breathes.

The sound of the church-bell stole faintly through the woods, ringing for the mid-week service. Long years before it had been taken from a wreck which had gone to pieces upon the reefs; high above the tumult of that memorable storm it had sounded, calling upon the people of David for help; they heard it, anguished, and could render none. The story had a fascination for Aylmer, for among the bodies washed ashore were those of a young and handsome man, and, tight clasped in his arms, a lovely girl.

She had often lingered by their single grave; there, upon the hillside for thirty years they had slept well.

God and the woman he loved! In the last great moment had not every other thought sunk into insignificance?

And so the church bell was to her a memorial of these two — she never heard it without thinking of them.

"You sure you won't be lonely now while Adolf and I go to church?" inquired Ina anxiously.

"Oh, no, no!" She smiled up into the old, hard face. "I have such beautiful things to think of, Ina."

But after they were gone she paced restlessly up and down the piazza. How long she had waited — how resolutely she had argued. She could wait and argue no more.

And there in the faint twilight, so glad of the loneliness, she wrote to him the little note which became precious the moment the words upon the paper looked up at her.

"Christian, wherever you are, you must come to me. I cannot do without you any longer. I love you."

Ah, she sealed the envelope at last, and then in a passion of eagerness ran down the lonely road to the post-office. Wherever he might be, this would find him, and he would come — oh, she knew that. Why, he loved her — never for a moment had she doubted that.

"You come late," said old Knut the postmaster. He was leaning over the garden gate, smoking his last pipe for the day.

Aylmer slipped the letter into the box. "Yes," she said breathlessly. "I ran. It's a lonely road. But I had to get my letter in. You see" — she must say it — she must hear it for herself as fact — "you see, my husband will soon be here."

"Ah, yes, yes, I see," replied Knut appreciatively. He was the philosopher of the settlement. And now he laughed softly. "Love — it is a big thing. And some people never understand that." The smoke snorted from his pipe in contempt. "Love? why, there's me. I love a girl in Norway. I come here. I see her no more for thirty year. Then one day I feel something. I cannot wait at all. I write. I say: 'Here is the money, Anna. You come. And quick.'

"I seal that letter very hard. Then I remember the dog. I open the letter, and I say: 'Anna, you come if you can love the dog. Else, you stay.' She come. But she only live one year with us."

"Why, didn't she like it?" Aylmer wondered that she had never heard this story before.

"Yes, she like it. We both like it, and the dog. But she die."

He puffed in silence for a moment: then he added: "Wacker goes for a walk with me every Sunday — back there" — he looked over his shoulder towards the hill — "and we stand there, and I say to him: 'Wacker, you never forget Anna,' and he beat his tail and we come away.

"And these people — these — say to me: 'Knut, you better get marry again.' Me marry! and Anna there on the hill? No, no!"

The days passed, and Aylmer watched the little bay as one who listens to heavenly music, entranced.

And each day her face grew sweeter, and the light that waited in her eyes, more lovely.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

INA, Ina!"

The telegram fluttered from Aylmer's fingers to the floor.

"Oh, Ina — my husband — there has been an accident. I must go."

An hour later she stood on the shore ready to step into the boat which was to take her across the bay to the nearest train station. A mournful little group surrounded her. "Jert, I won't forget," she said with a long look for the boy. "And Engebret, you know I shall think of you."

Many hands pushed the boat off, and through a blur of tears Aylmer waved farewell to these friends she felt so dear. How completely she had merged her life and all its interests in theirs for the time. Yet in a moment the thread that bound her to them had snapped. Already she saw the familiar shore through distant eyes — had she indeed lived there through long weeks and thought herself content?

There, it was beating in her brain again, that brief, cruel message from Christie Bronsart: *Meet me in Chicago Friday on train leaving Pike Bay Thursday night. Christian injured. An accident. Can reach him Sunday.*

Christian injured? How? Where?

And what had she been doing all these months, insisting that he should go his way, that she might follow hers unhampered?

Christian, Christian! What misery of suspense as the long night hours dragged slowly through to the dawn, and she lay tormented, answering the questions which besieged her heart in infinite variety of bewilderment.

Day came at last, only to bring with it sharper realization of her wretchedness. The long weeks at David seemed to be part of some previous existence in which she had moved as in a dream. Her life had ended, as it seemed now, at the moment when she had parted from Christian; she had awakened as from long sleep, but to what consciousness of pain and fear!

"Fifty-ninth Street!" She sat alert, her eyes wide with excitement. "Twenty-third!" Her heart began such cruel beat — it was but a question of moments now, and she would know. Oh, did he want her? Ah, if he only did! But what if he did not?

"Twelfth Street Depot — Chicago — all change!"

She stepped blindly from the car, and for an agonized instant stood helpless.

"Well, well!" She turned sharply — it was Sincerity, her strong old face all stirred and tender. "Yes, yes, child. Mr. Bronsart brought me with him. He thought some one of your own ought to be with you, and your father's out West. Mr. Bronsart's at the hotel. We're to go there, and then we leave for the South in about three hours."

The usual calmness was gone from Sincerity's manner; she spoke tremulously and avoided looking at Aylmer.

"But Sincerity — Oh, Sin dear, is he — is he —" she choked with fear.

"My lamb, he's living. And maybe he is to live. We shall soon know."

The gravity of the tone alarmed her afresh. "Oh, Sin, Sin," she moaned, "how did it happen?"

"In the mill, my child — the cotton mill."

"The mill?" repeated Aylmer bewildered.

"Child, he's been there, nearly ever since you left."

"Christian — my Christian?" She sat straight in the carriage; her white face flamed crimson.

Then in a moment she was still — she did not speak again until they reached the hotel and Christie Bronsart was at the carriage door. His thin, strained face— the little stoop which had come to his shoulders since she saw him last — the general, indefinable ageing of his sprightly figure forced instant acknowledgment upon her of the changes in him.

She followed him in silence to the parlour where he had evidently been writing.

But hardly was the door closed when he turned upon her — a Christie Bronsart she had never seen before.

"Oh, damn you!" he said; "damn you!"

His hands were clenched; he was an old, stricken man.

"Damn the day when you came into my boy's life — damn the day when you married him! You and your Forsythe ideas!" He struck the table beside him.

"What have they to do with my boy? It's because of you that he's lying down there to-night mangled by that brute machinery — what business had *my* boy — *my* son — doing work like that? And it's all because of you and your cursed ideas."

Aylmer sank into a chair and covered her face with her hands. But her misery had reached that height where she was hardly conscious of added suffering.

After a long time she looked up. Bronsart sat, staring straight out of the window before him. His eyes saw only the face of his boy.

"Mangled?" — she repeated with lips that shrank — "mangled?"

Bronsart nodded; there was long silence again.

He took out his watch — Oh, the slow, slow minutes here, and the swift ones there, where Death hovered with carrion claw outstretched! His strong heart fainted within him — Oh, the boy, the boy!

The storm which had shaken him at sight of Aylmer passed. What a girl she looked, and how broken by this shock!

After a long time she spoke; he hardly caught her words. "Yes, yes. I know — my ideas — they must seem to you — Oh, they seem to me — but why — why? — for they were right — I know it — but they 've worked out all wrong. And now Christian — Christian —" her tears choked her.

He leaned over to her. "Child, child!" he said tenderly. "We're in this together, and we'll bear it together."

She buried her face in the pillow on the couch and sobbed. And he thought it well that she should.

"Aylmer," he said gently, when at last she was quiet, "I have a letter for you. Would you like to have it now?"

She sat up. "A letter — from — from — ?"

"Yes, from Christian. When he went South he left it with me. You were to have it — in case — in case anything happened."

She took it — held it in helpless fingers.

"And in his last letter to me—See! you might like to read this—" he spread a page before her—what sheets there were, and how closely written. And not for her — not for her — that was the thought that stabbed.

"Look, it's here."

Above his finger the sentence stood out sharp.

"You will remember, if anything should go wrong, and here in this hellhole where men's lives are worth nothing, where only the machine is sacred, one never knows what may be the next moment—you will remember that Aylmer must have my letter at once. And some day she may like to read those that I have written you out of the depths of this experience."

Ah, Christian, Christian! She hid her face again.

"I guess I'll go off for a smoke," said Bronsart. She must be alone with her letter, he thought.

At last she opened it, and through blinding storms of tears, read the precious words:

"My Wife: — It's very late, and the house is so still — and so empty. I have a great deal yet to do, for to-morrow I'm going away for a long time.

As I analyse my motives, I know I am not going because I want to go — I am not moved to this step by lofty love of my neighbour as you would be. But if men have made such experiments in the interests of social science, how much easier it ought to be for me to do so for the sake of the wife who at this moment is so dear to me that I do not know how to bear another day of my life without her. Oh Aylmer, Aylmer, it has been so hard.

But what will happen, beloved, if I come back and tell you that I have made the trial and that my ideas remain unchanged by it? Will you be able to believe then, that I too, have a conscience in spite of appearances, and that my honour is as dear to me as yours is to you?

Yet perhaps, even then, you will see that these weary months of unhappiness and alienation have taught me something — that I, because I am husband, may not assume to be conscience for you. I should like to do that always, I know, but my darling, I will not, and you must not let me.

What a coward I am — how I dread the coming of to-morrow, and the new life that is before me. I shall be such a clumsy workman, and how shall I get work? That fear unnerves me already. I have never had to go out and earn a dollar unaided in my life. I am afraid.

Oh Aylmer, Aylmer, what are you doing away there in the stillness? Have you thought of me once to-day?

My darling, I draw you near to me, and I whisper: Because I love you, I do this thing that I *hate*."

Forty-eight hours later, after a journey rendered cruel by every species of delay and missed connection, Aylmer waited, in the common parlour of a dejected-looking frame hotel, for word from the sick-room. She was faint with fear.

A woman in nurse's garb hurried into the room; she had a kindly, peaceful face.

"Ah, you're here at last. I have been counting the minutes, for this afternoon we thought it best to tell

him that you were coming — we had been afraid to speak of it before. But after all it was the wise thing, for you see, he fell asleep." She turned to Aylmer. "I told him that if he slept as I wanted him to, he would awake and find you beside him. I think you had better come up at once."

Aylmer held out her hand to Christie Bronsart.

"No, no, child," he said gently. "You go first. I'll come presently."

She followed the nurse, stumbling up a dark stairway, then down a long, narrow, half-lighted passage.

"It's quieter here, you see," the woman said softly. She opened the creaking door carefully, and alone, Aylmer went in.

She stood for some moments — trembling, blind. Then slowly, sight came. *That* — Christian!

With a smothered moan she leaned over and took the thin, work-scarred hand in hers, and laid it, so dear to her, against her cheek.

And so she waited, while he slept, and the sun sank low in the west.

And then, just as day died upon the far-off hills, he opened his eyes and found her.

"My darling," he whispered painfully, "my darling, it has been such a long, long time to wait."

"*Beloved, have you seen the vision?*

In the deep silence of the night, the great question with which Boothroyd had closed his sermon came

back with power that mastered every vagrant thought.

Had she seen it? — had Christian? And were they, together, ready to be obedient unto it?

Her heart made high answer. Ay, life for them was to be along no rose-leaf path — they were not to take it less than nobly — together, they were to suffer — to know the agony of doubt, of self-distrust — to feel at times the hopeless misery which sees ahead no righting of the world's great wrongs.

But she heard again the low, intensely-uttered words: "To the wheel, beloved, to the wheel."

Her white face glowed. Ah, how magnificently the man, her husband, had set his shoulder to it. She bent down and kissed with brooding lips the hand that lay helpless on the coverlet — the hand, it seemed to her, maimed and scarred as the Christ's with the bitter wounds of humanity.

"Soul of man, wouldst thou see Paradise with me when the night of life is past?"

"Ay, Lord, ay. But how — but how?"

This was the question to which their lives were to make answer, through what blindness of mistake, what passion of prejudice, what tragedy of weakness, of cowardice, of self-deceiving.

But also, through what persistence of righteousness, what trembling but triumphant faith in the majesty of that Ideal which seeks victory in sacrifice,

peace in renunciation, and death, if need be, on Calvary.

"The procession passes:
Beloved, have you seen the Vision?"

THE END

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